

SHANKAR DEV

Shankaravara could run faster than all his friends and swim across the Brahmaputra when it was in spate. But when his grandmother scolded him for not paying attention to his books, he took her words seriously. Named Shankar Dev by his guru, the young man fulfilled all his duties as a student and a householder before embarking on a voyage of self-discovery. A voyage which led to his starting the Vaishnava movement in Assam.

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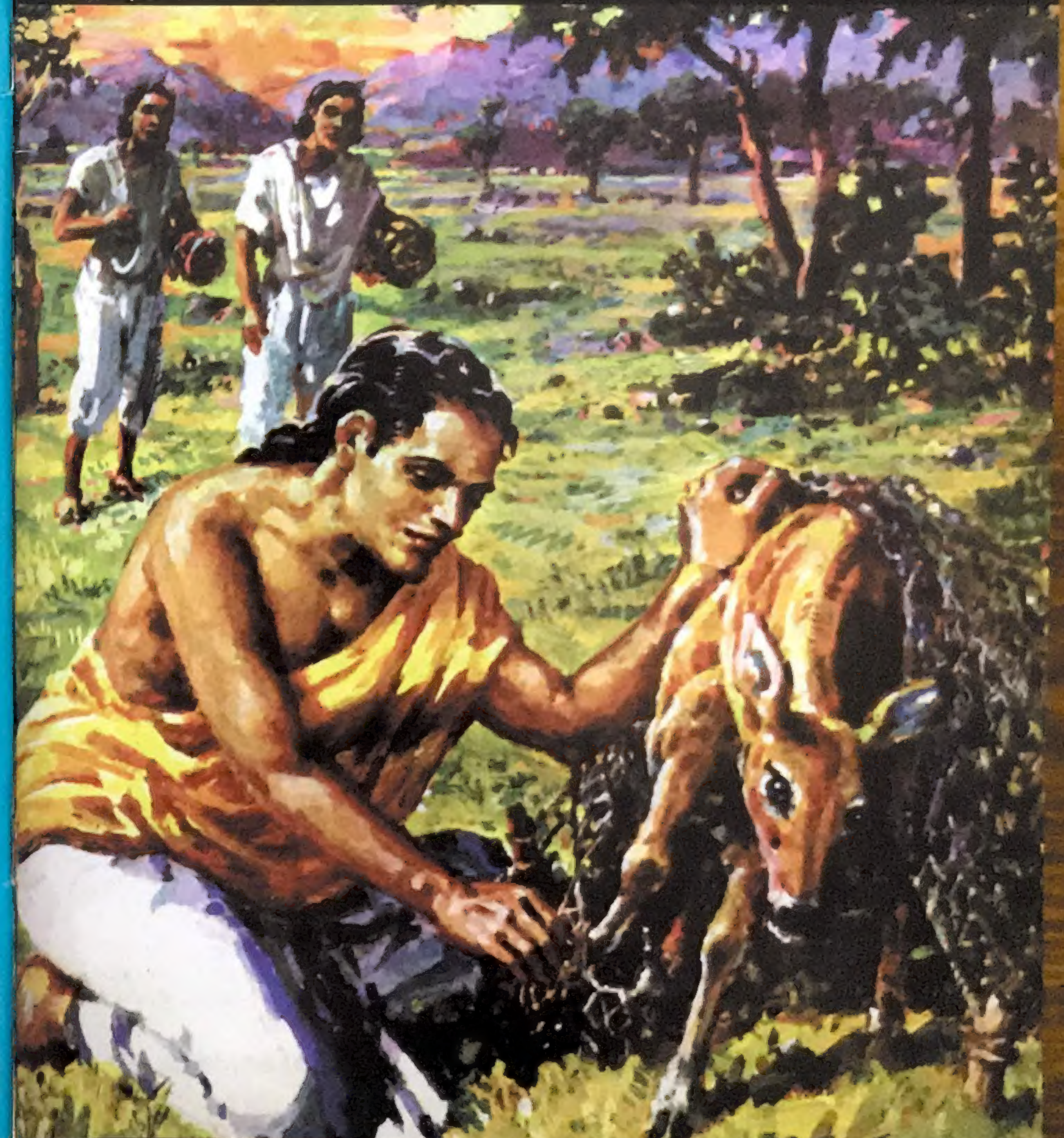
VISIONARIES



SHANKAR DEV

PREACHING THE RELIGION OF LOVE

Vol 742 | ₹50

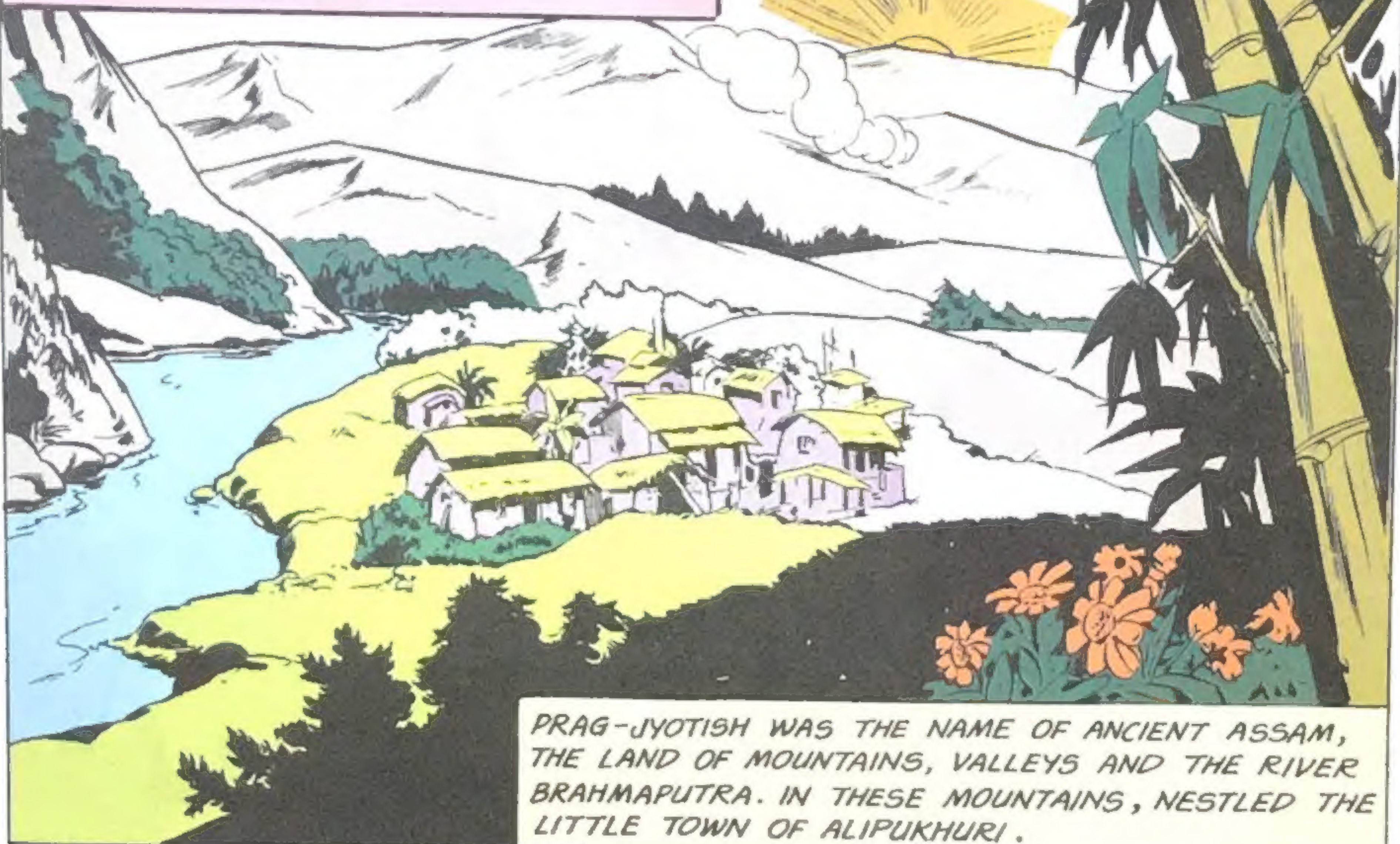


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SHANKAR DEV



IN ALIPUKHURI, IN THE YEAR 1449, A SON WAS BORN TO THE SHIROMANI* OF BHUYANS, OR CHIEFTAINS.

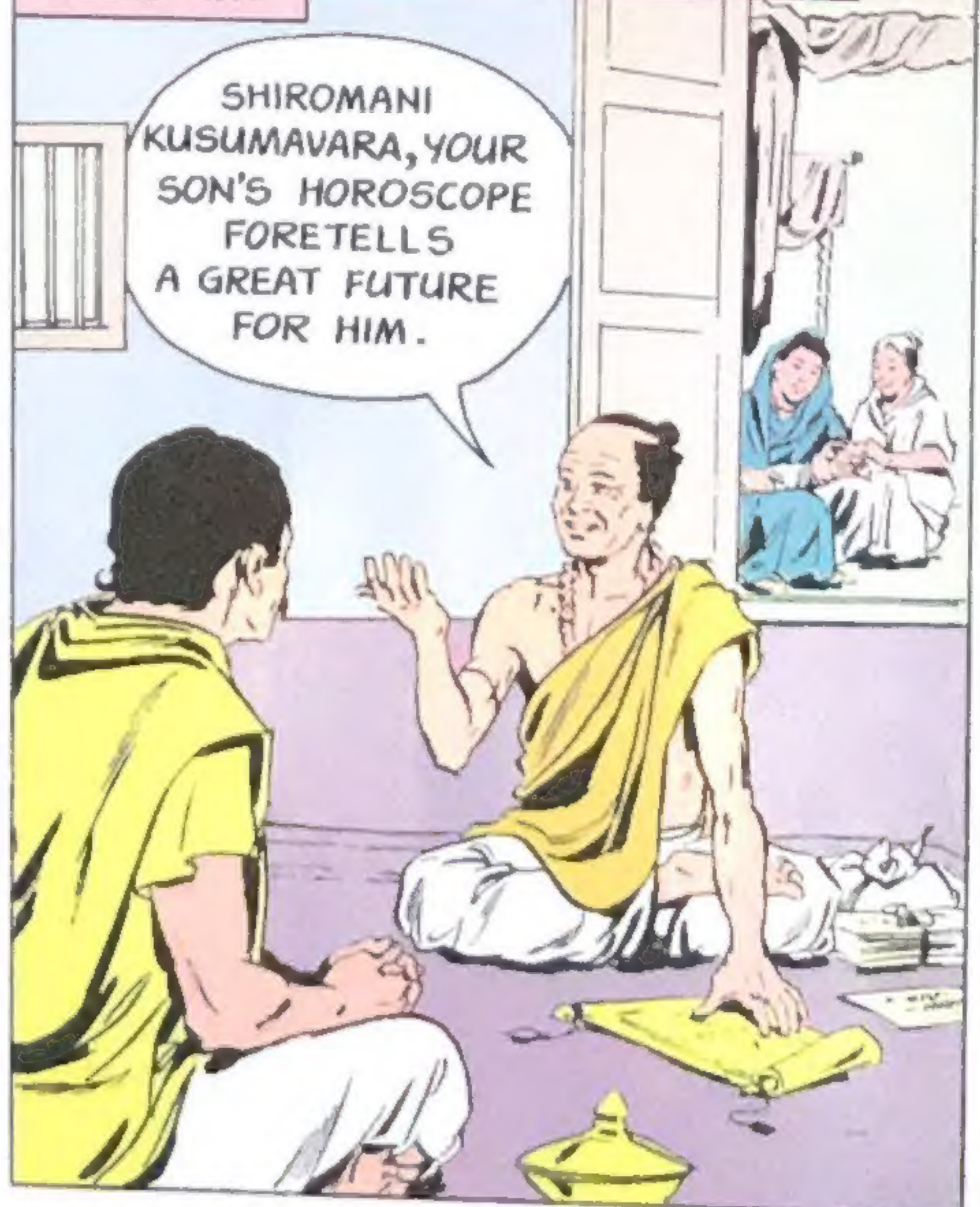
LORD SHIVA HAS GRANTED US OUR WISH AT LAST.

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CHILD HE IS, SATYA-SANDHA! LET US CALL HIM SHANKARAVARA†.



SHANTARAM, THE FAMILY PRIEST WAS CALLED IN.

SHIROMANI KUSUMAVARA, YOUR SON'S HOROSCOPE FORETELLS A GREAT FUTURE FOR HIM.

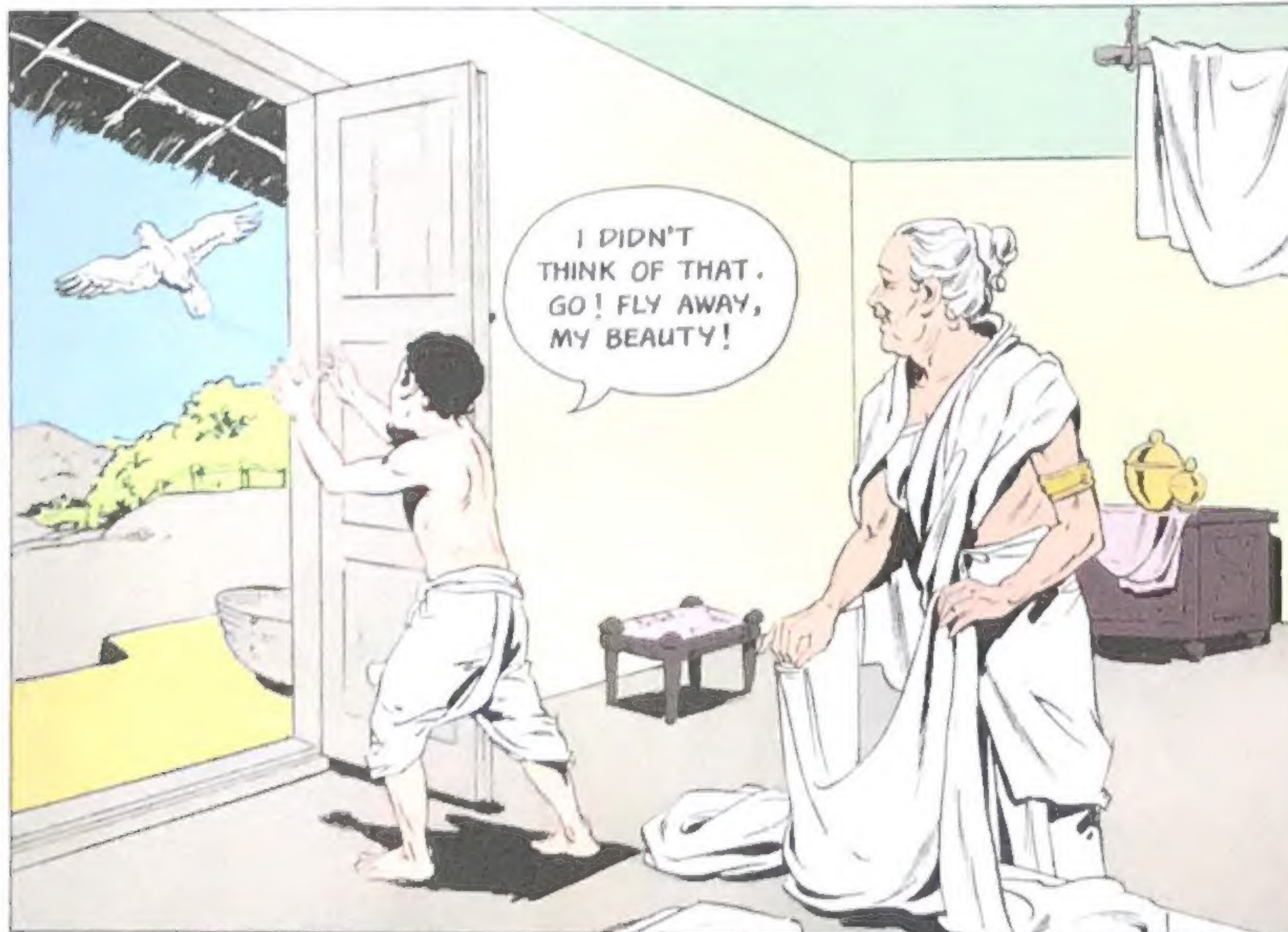


* OVERLORD † VARA IS A BOON, AND SHANKARA IS ANOTHER NAME FOR SHIVA

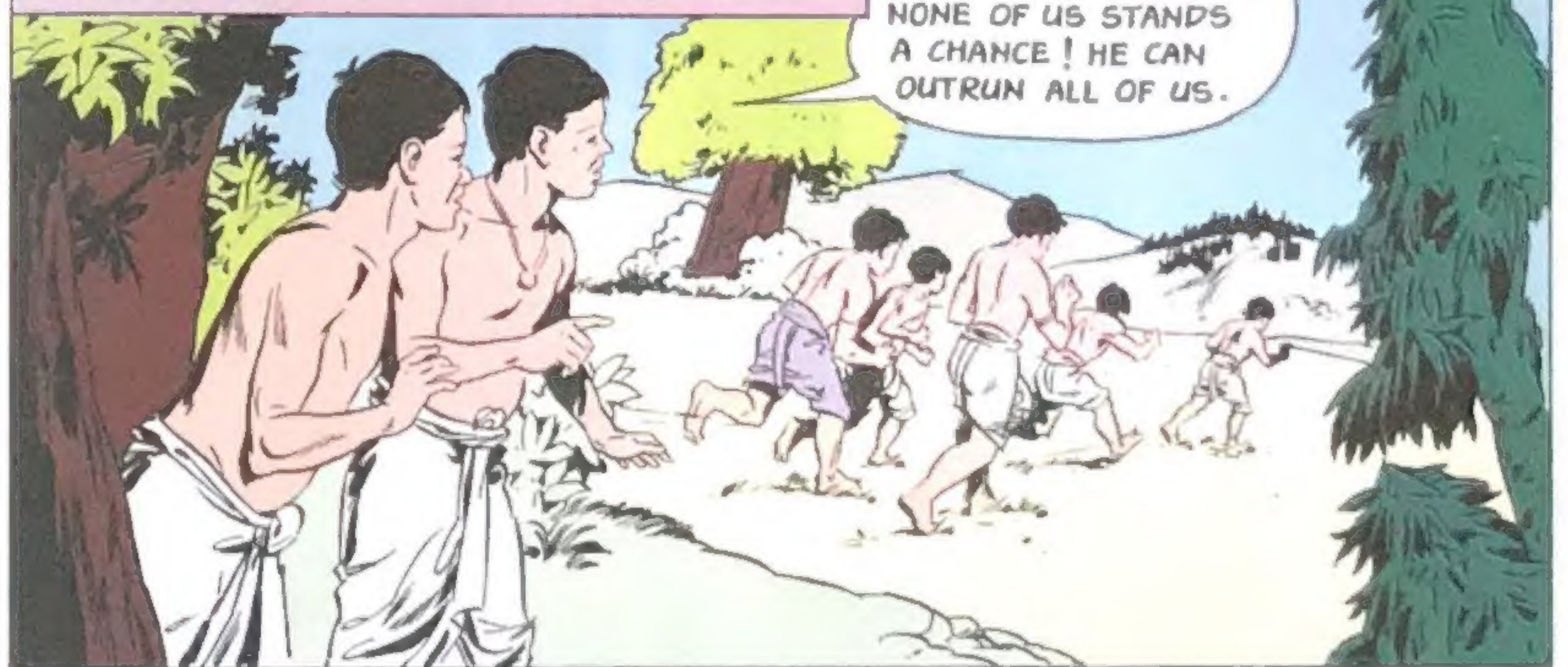
A FEW DAYS LATER, SATYASANDHA DIED.



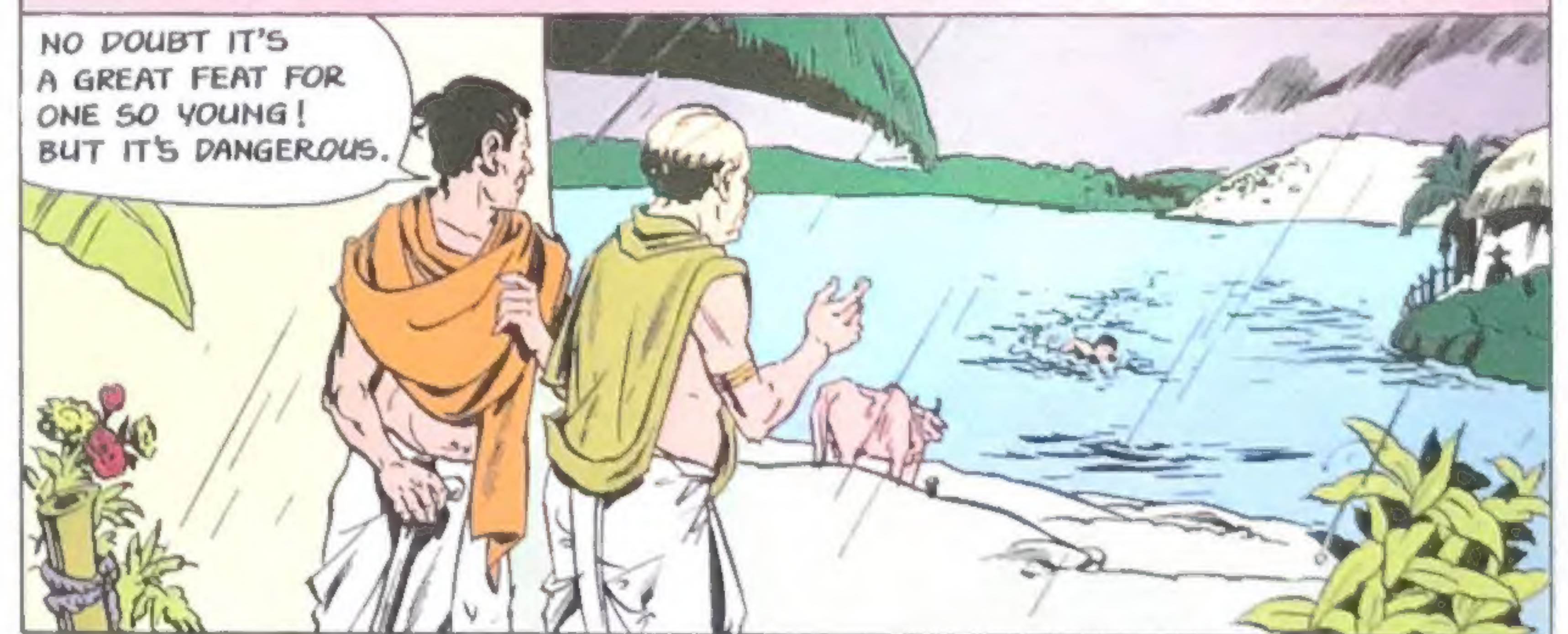
NOT LONG AFTER THAT, KUSUMAVARA TOO DIED. BUT UNDER THE LOVING CARE OF KHERSUTI, HIS GRANDMOTHER, SHANKARAVARA GREW UP INTO A HEALTHY, INTELLIGENT BOY.



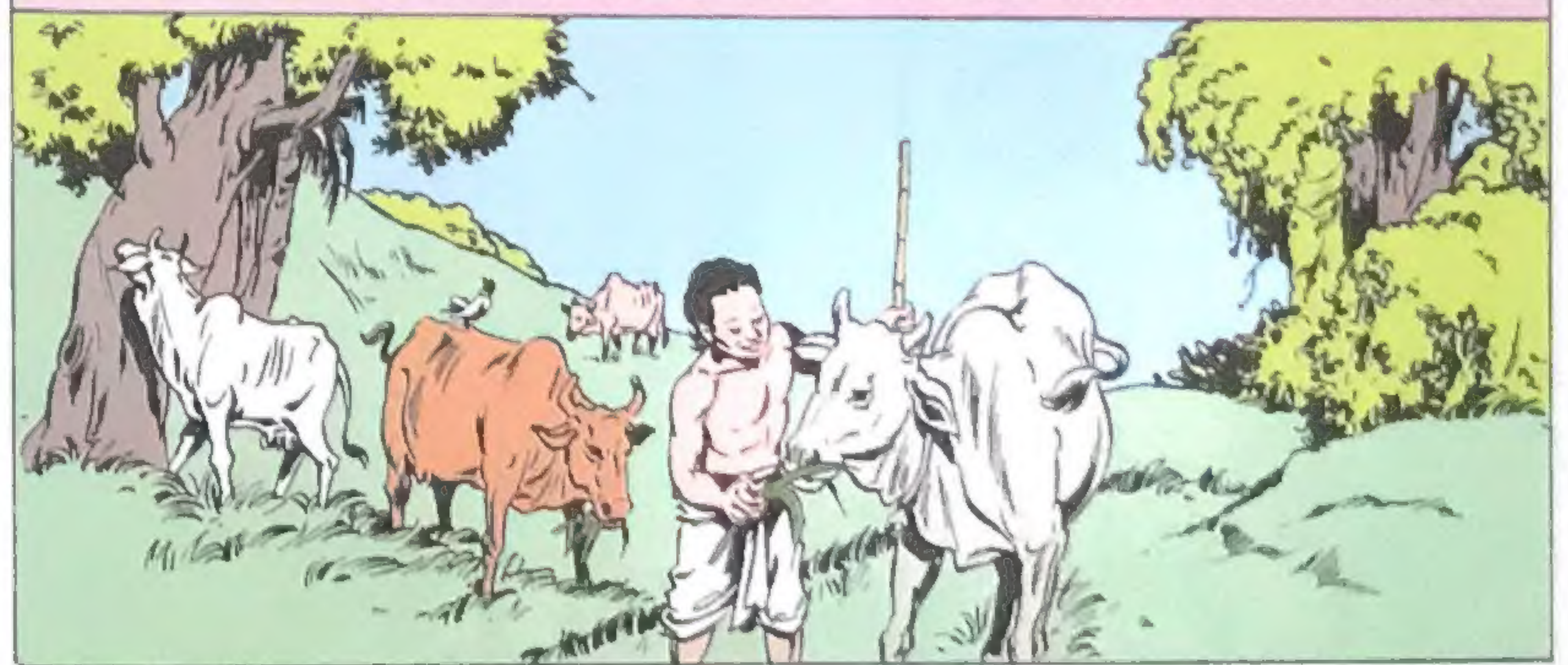
SHANKARAVARA LOVED SPORTS AND GAMES.



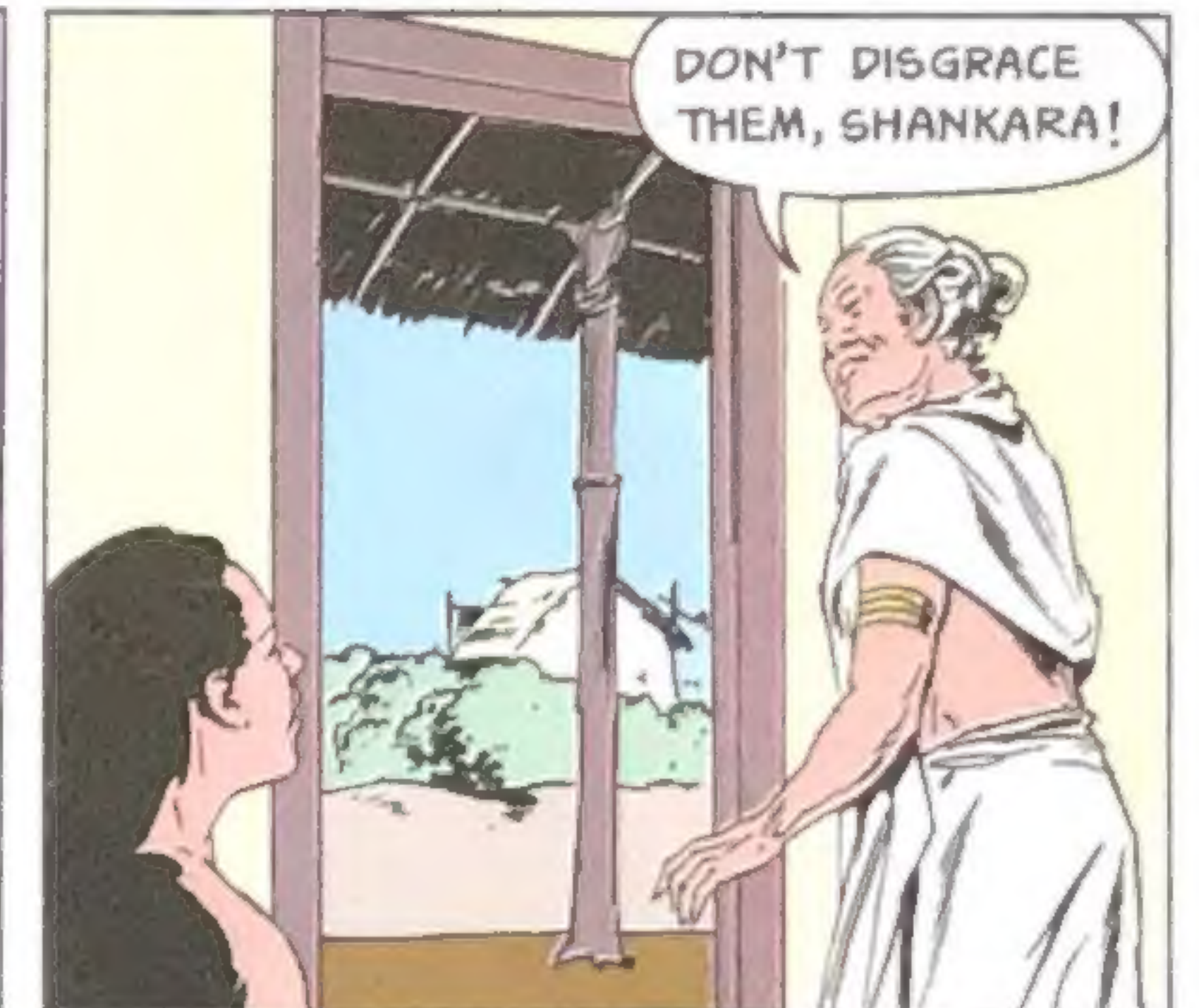
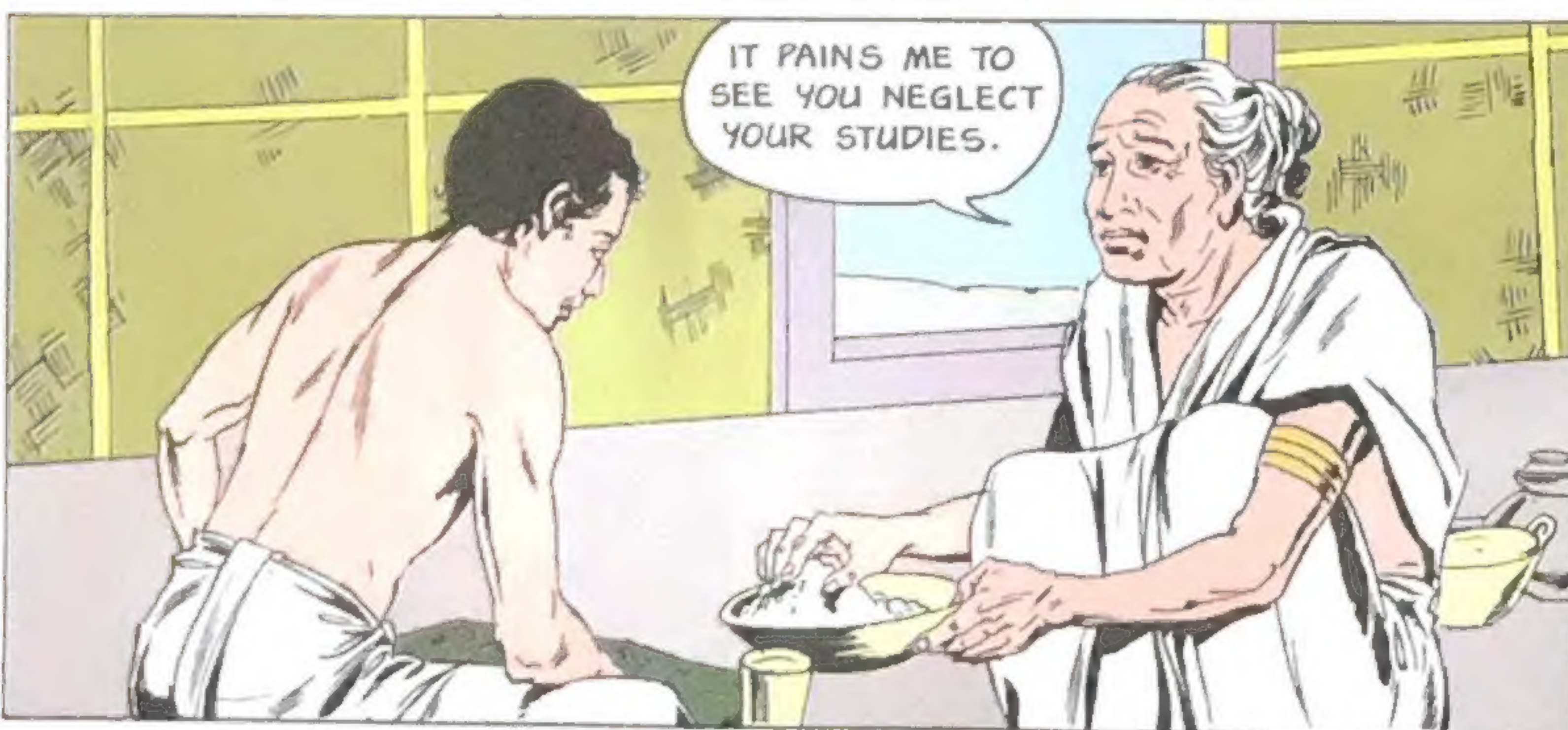
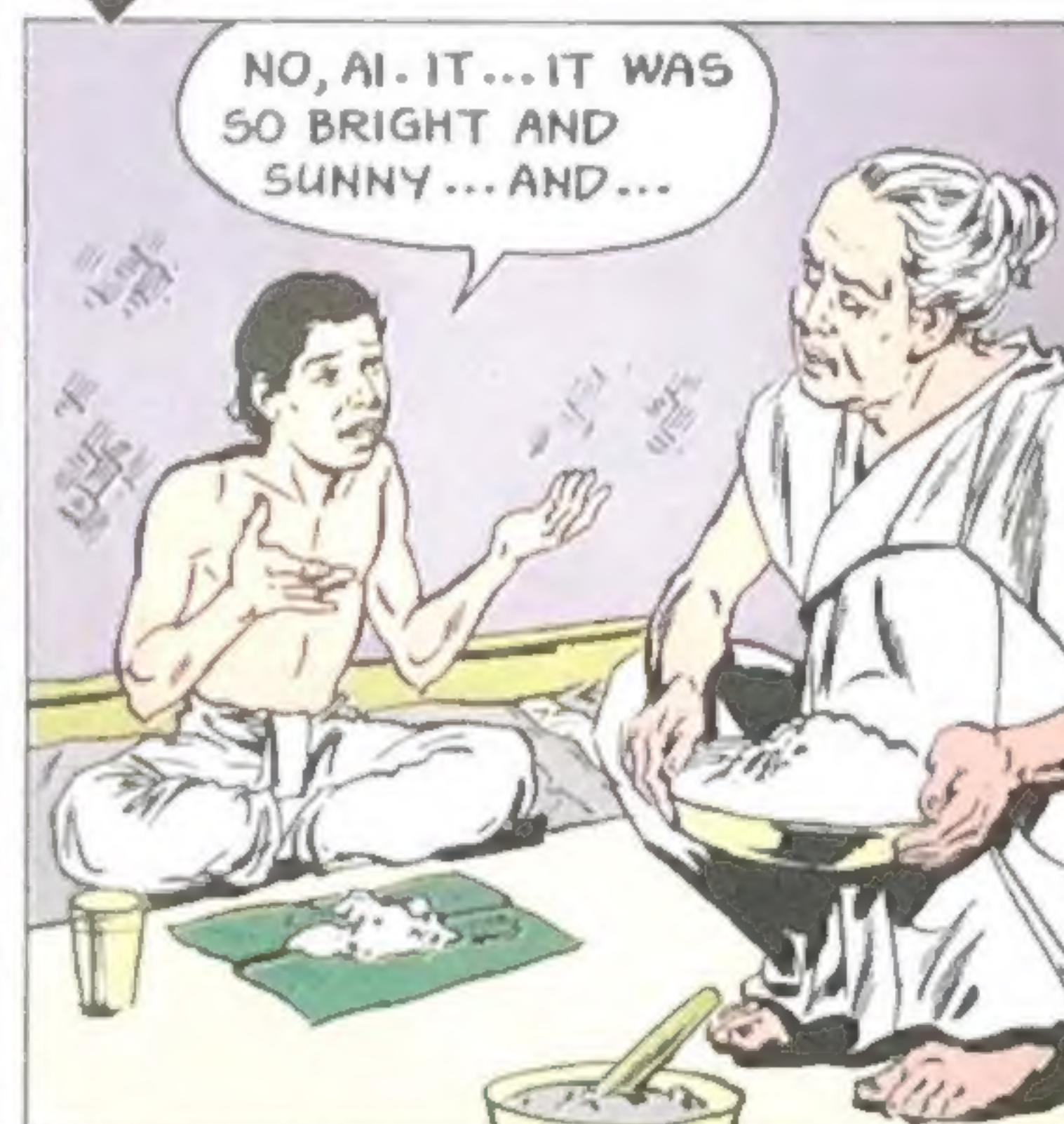
HE COULD SWIM ACROSS THE MIGHTY BRAHMAPUTRA, EVEN WHEN IT WAS IN SPATE.



HIS GREATEST LOVE HOWEVER WAS TO TEND COWS AND TAKE THEM OUT TO GRAZE.



SHANKARAVARA WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD WHEN ONE DAY—



SHANKARA JOINED THE VILLAGE SCHOOL, CONDUCTED BY MAHENDRA KANDALI. HERE TOO, HE WAS EASILY THE BEST.



SHANKARA'S PASTIMES NOW TOOK A SCHOLARLY TURN. HE READ ASSAMESE POETRY...



... AND COMPOSED HIS OWN POEMS IN SIMPLE SANSKRIT.

KARATALA KAMALA,
KAMALADALA
NAYANA...

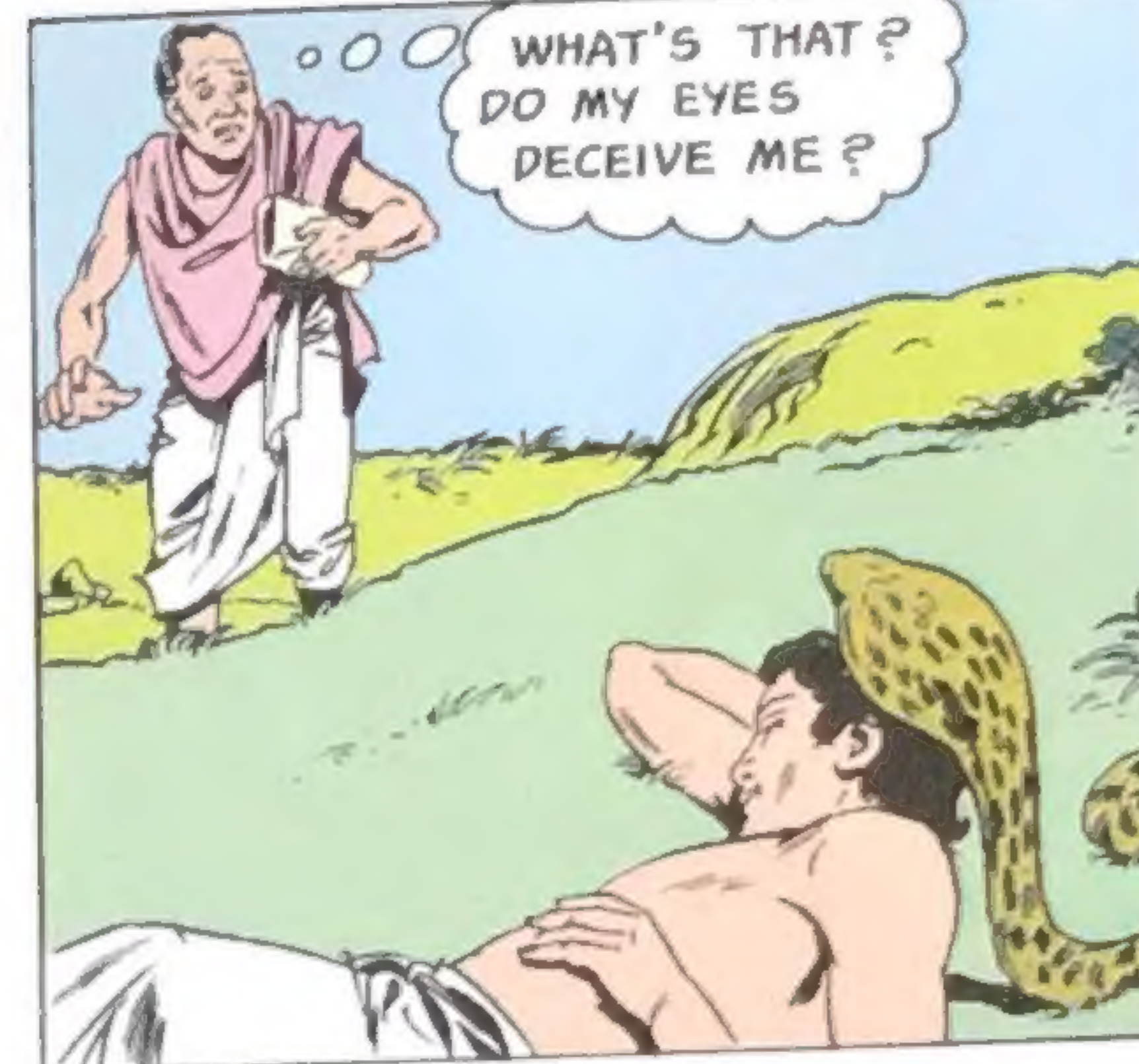


HOW GRATEFUL I AM
TO AI FOR GUIDING
ME TO THIS PATH!

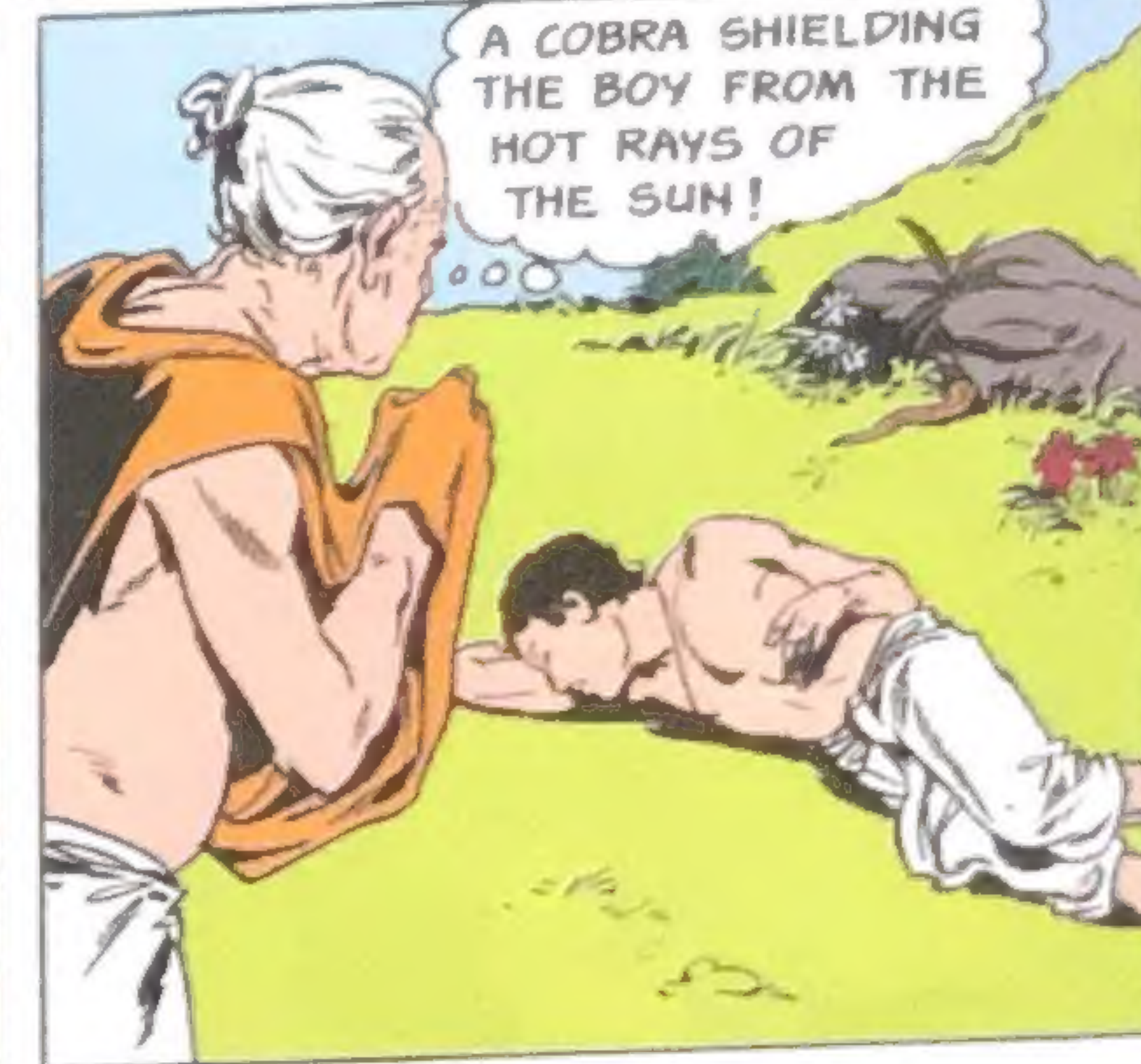


ONE DAY —

POOR SHANKARA HAS
FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE
SUN. I SHALL WAKE HIM
UP AND TELL HIM TO
SLEEP IN THE SHADE.



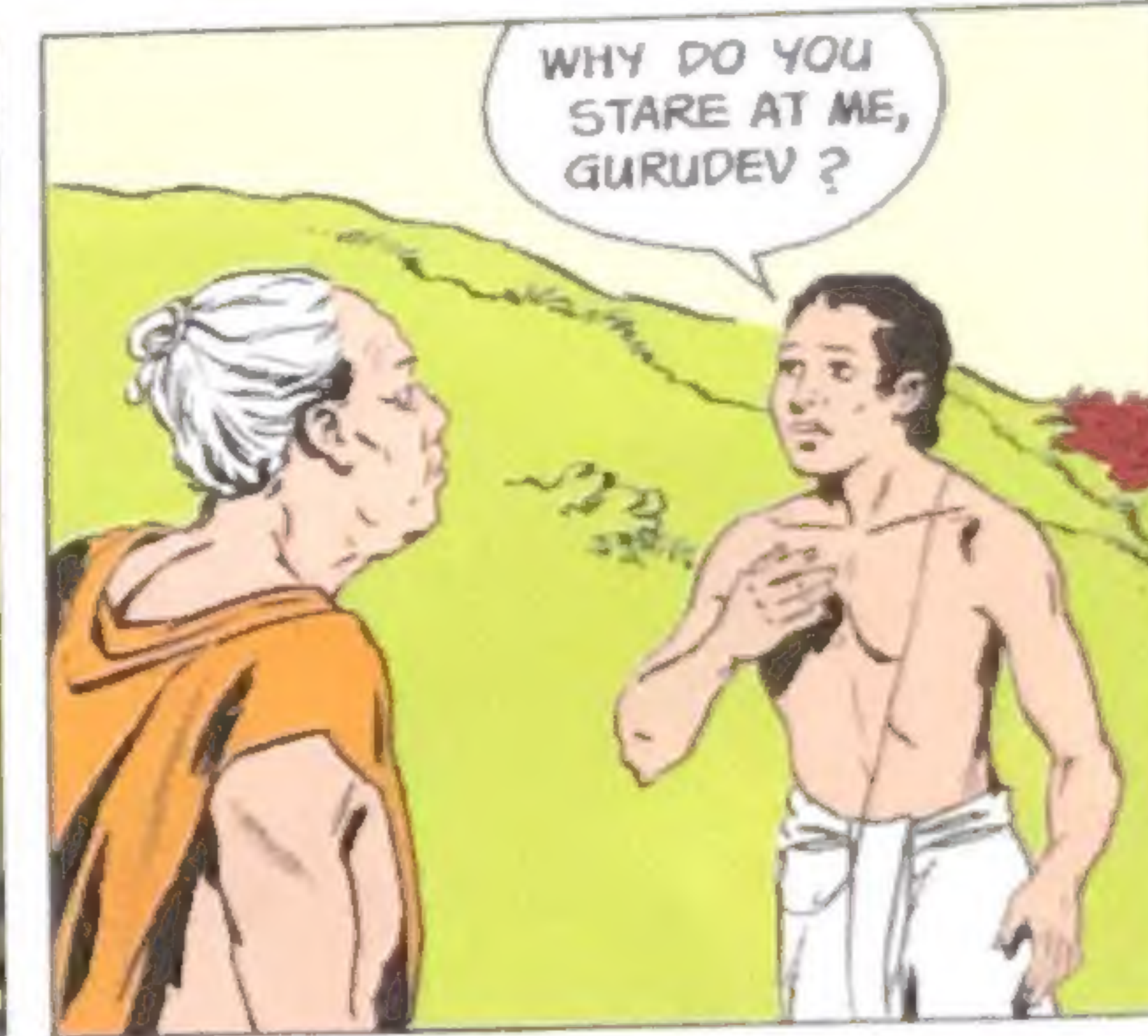
WHAT'S THAT?
DO MY EYES
DECEIVE ME?



A COBRA SHIELDING
THE BOY FROM THE
HOT RAYS OF
THE SUN!



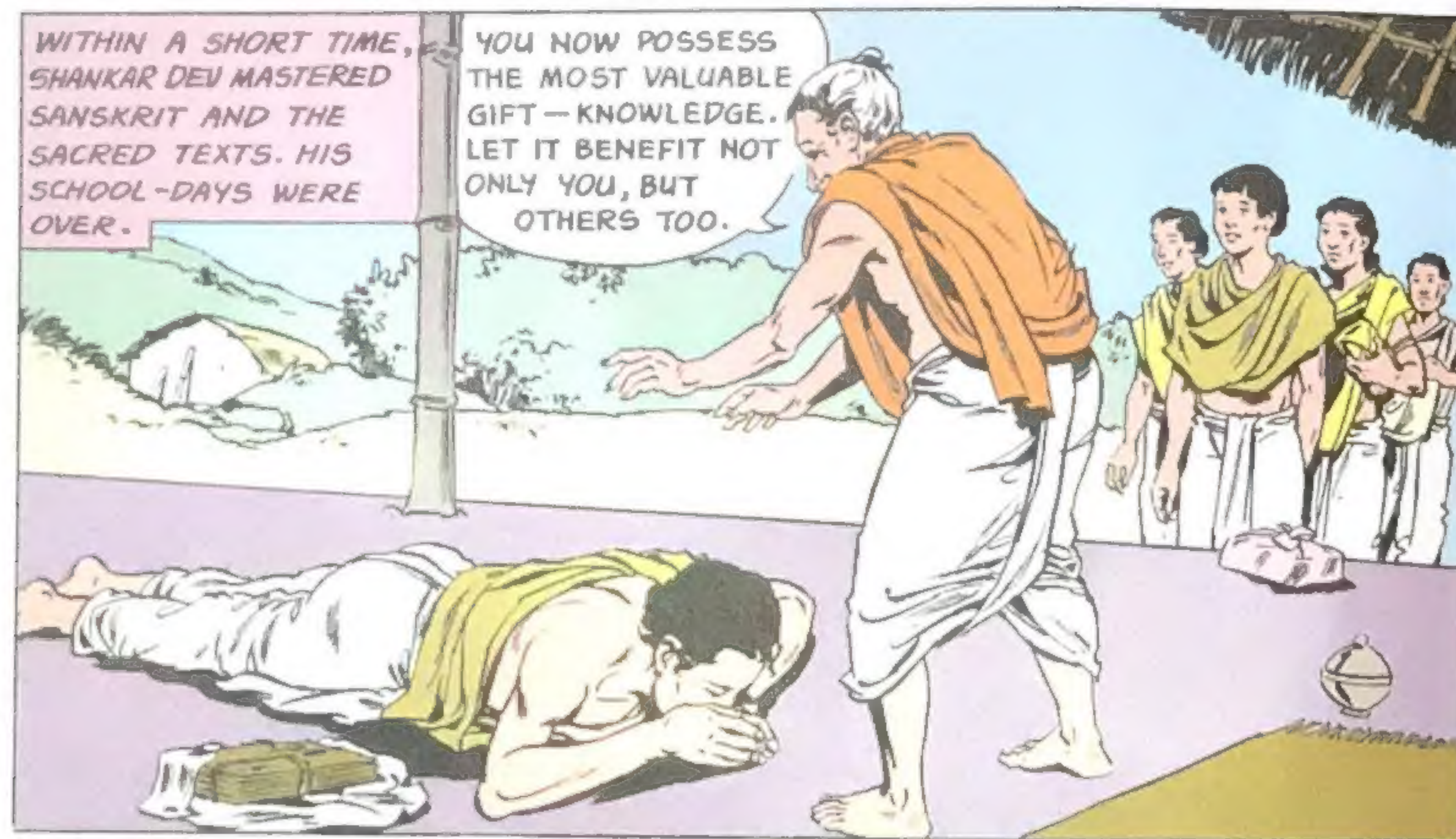
OH... FORGIVE ME,
GURUDEV! IT WAS SO
WARM I WENT TO
SLEEP IN SPITE OF
MYSELF.



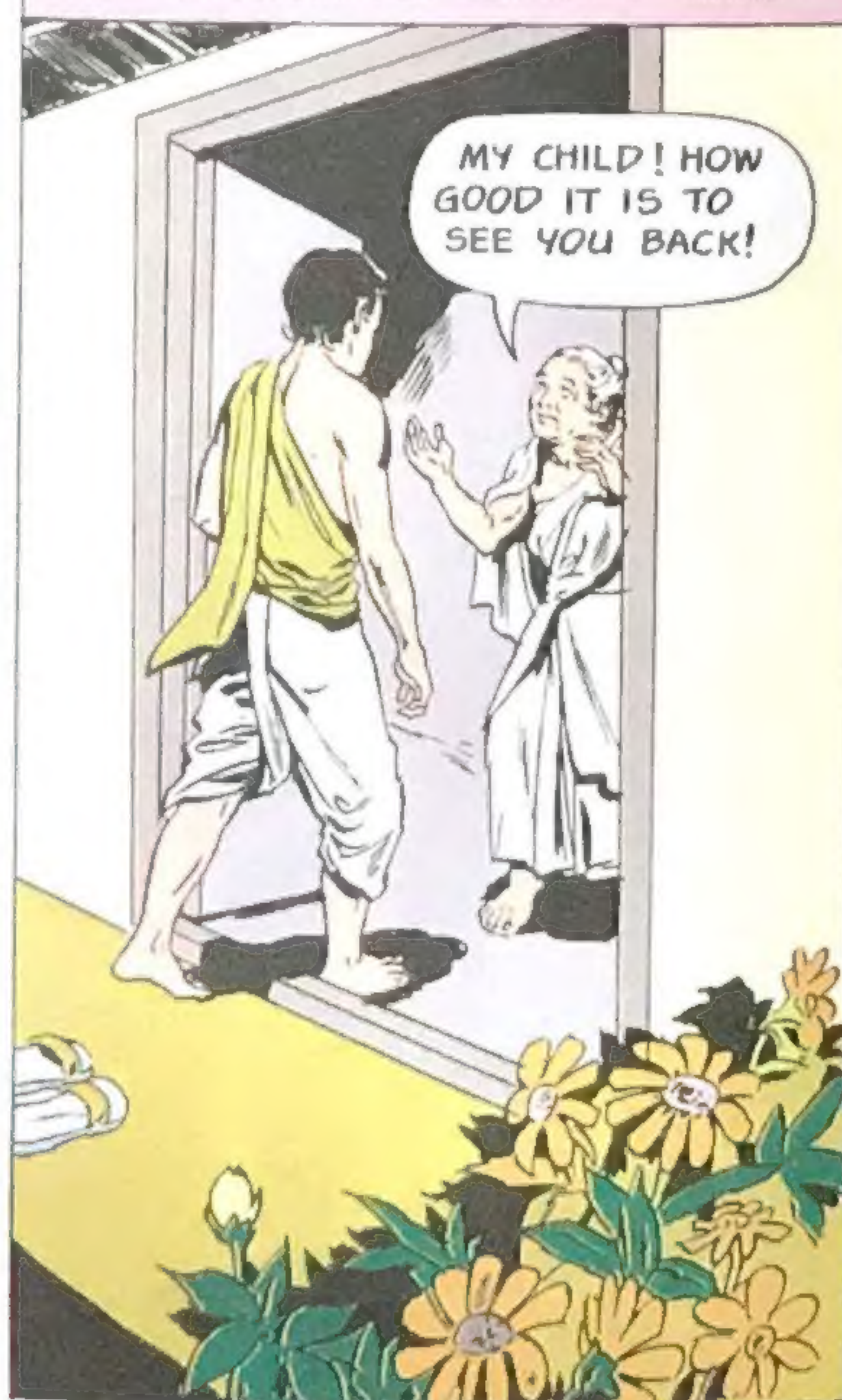
WHY DO YOU
STARE AT ME,
GURUDEV?



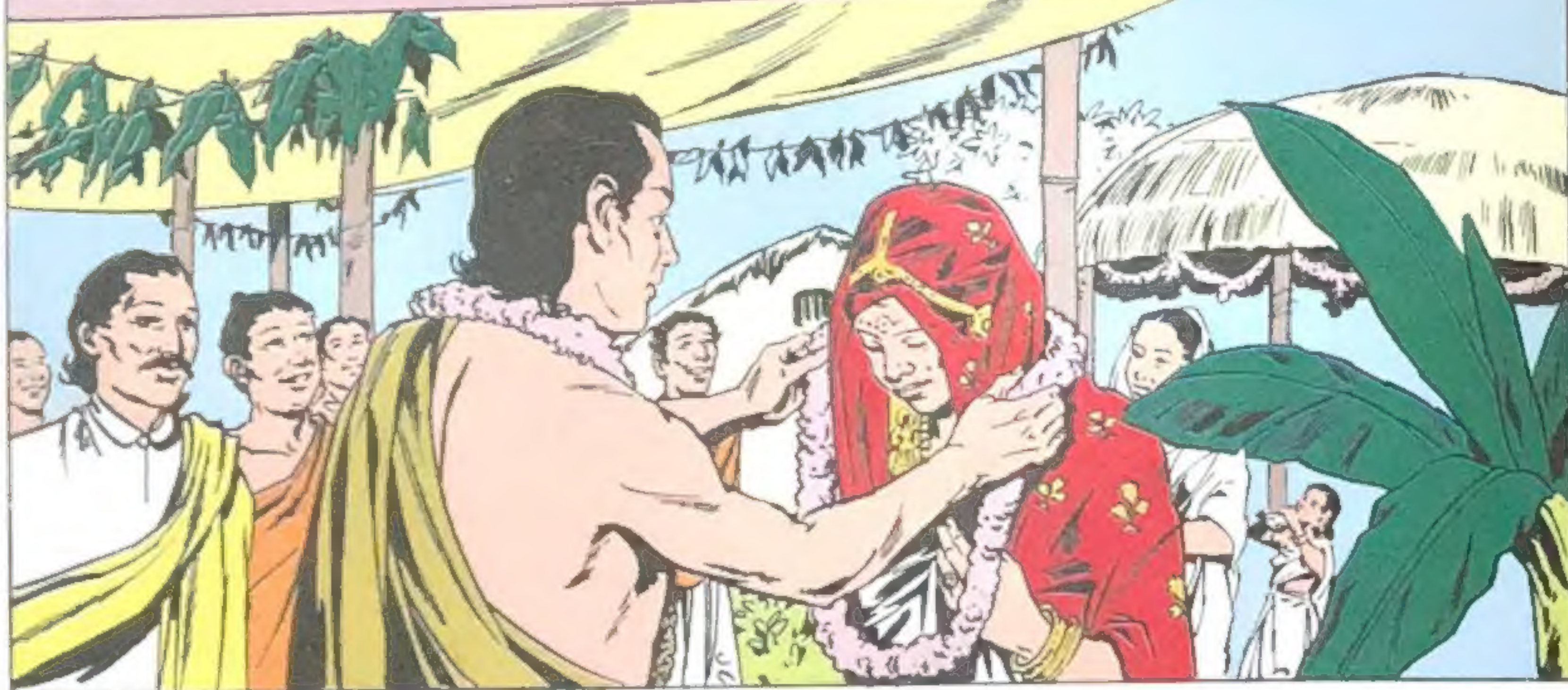
SHANKARA, YOU
ARE NOT AN ORDINARY
BOY. FROM TODAY, YOU
SHALL BE KNOWN AS
SHANKAR DEV.



WHEN SHANKAR DEV REACHED HOME —



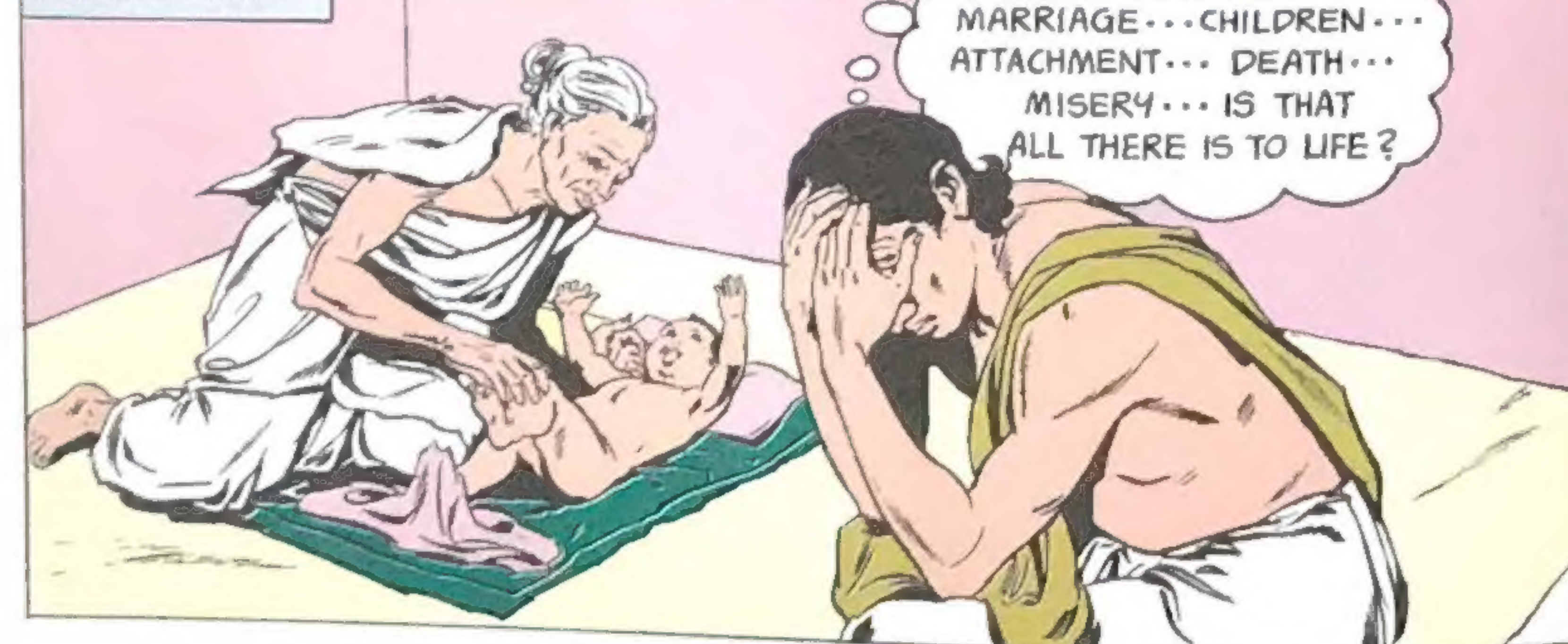
SHANKAR DEV WAS MARRIED TO A BEAUTIFUL GIRL NAMED SURYAVATI.



SOON, A CHILD WAS BORN TO THEM.



AND THEN SURYAVATI DIED. SHANKAR DEV FELL INTO THE DEPTHS OF DEPRESSION.



THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED WERE TROUBLED ONES FOR THE SHIROMANI.



HE BEGAN TO SPEND MORE AND MORE TIME IN CONTEMPLATION. HIS RELATIVES WERE WORRIED.



I LONG TO FREE MYSELF FROM THE BONDS OF LEADERSHIP AND GO AWAY — ON A LONG PILGRIMAGE.



SO SHANKAR DEV WAITED TILL HARIPRIYA CAME OF AGE AND MARRIED HER TO HARI, THE SON OF A BHUYAN.



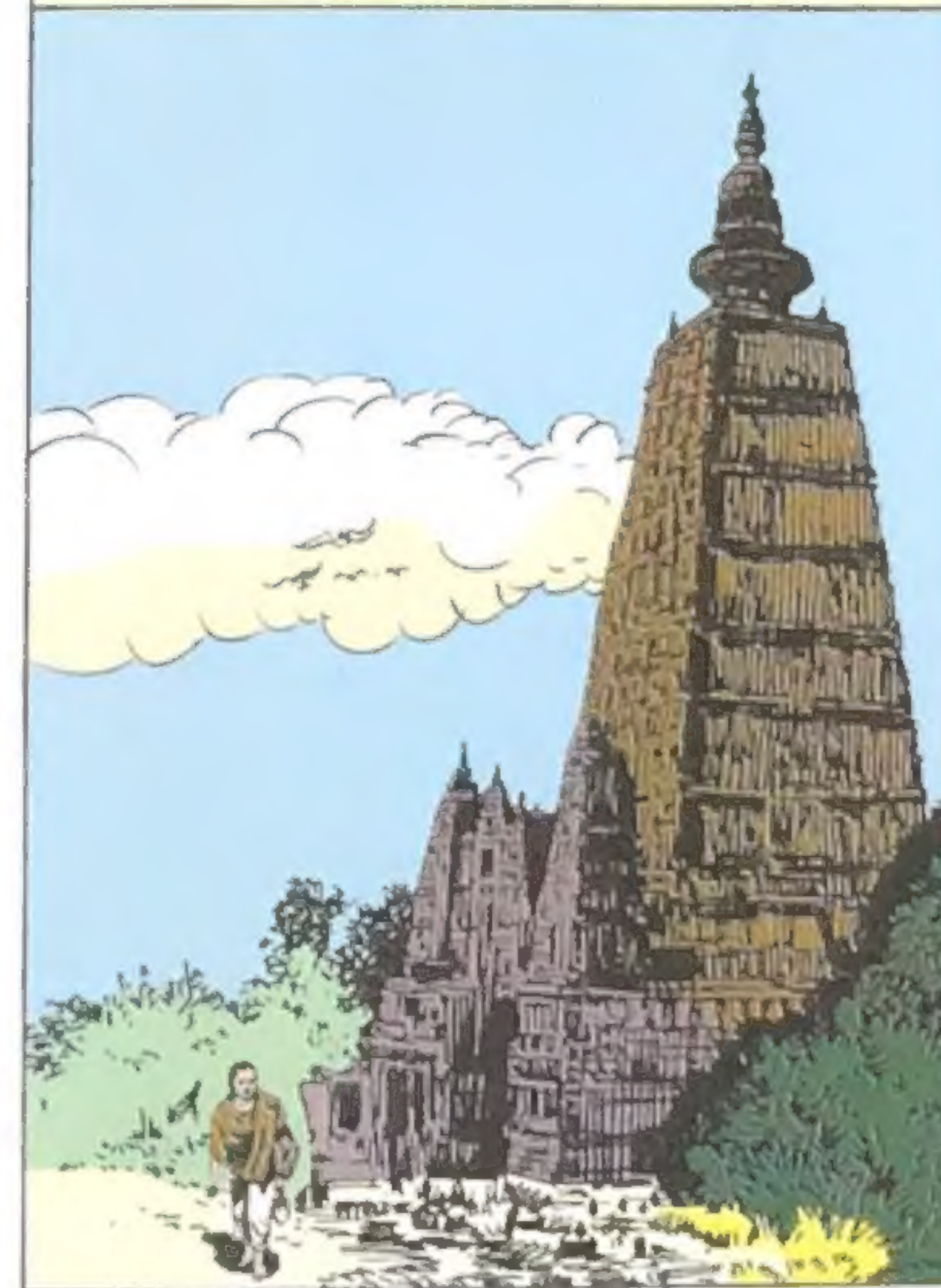
I HAVE AT LAST FULFILLED MY DUTIES AS A FATHER. I MAY NOW FULFIL MY LONG-CHERISHED DREAM OF VISITING THE SACRED PLACES OF MY MOTHER-LAND.



WITH SEVENTEEN OTHERS, INCLUDING MAHENDRA KANDALI, SHANKAR DEV LEFT ALIPUKHURI.

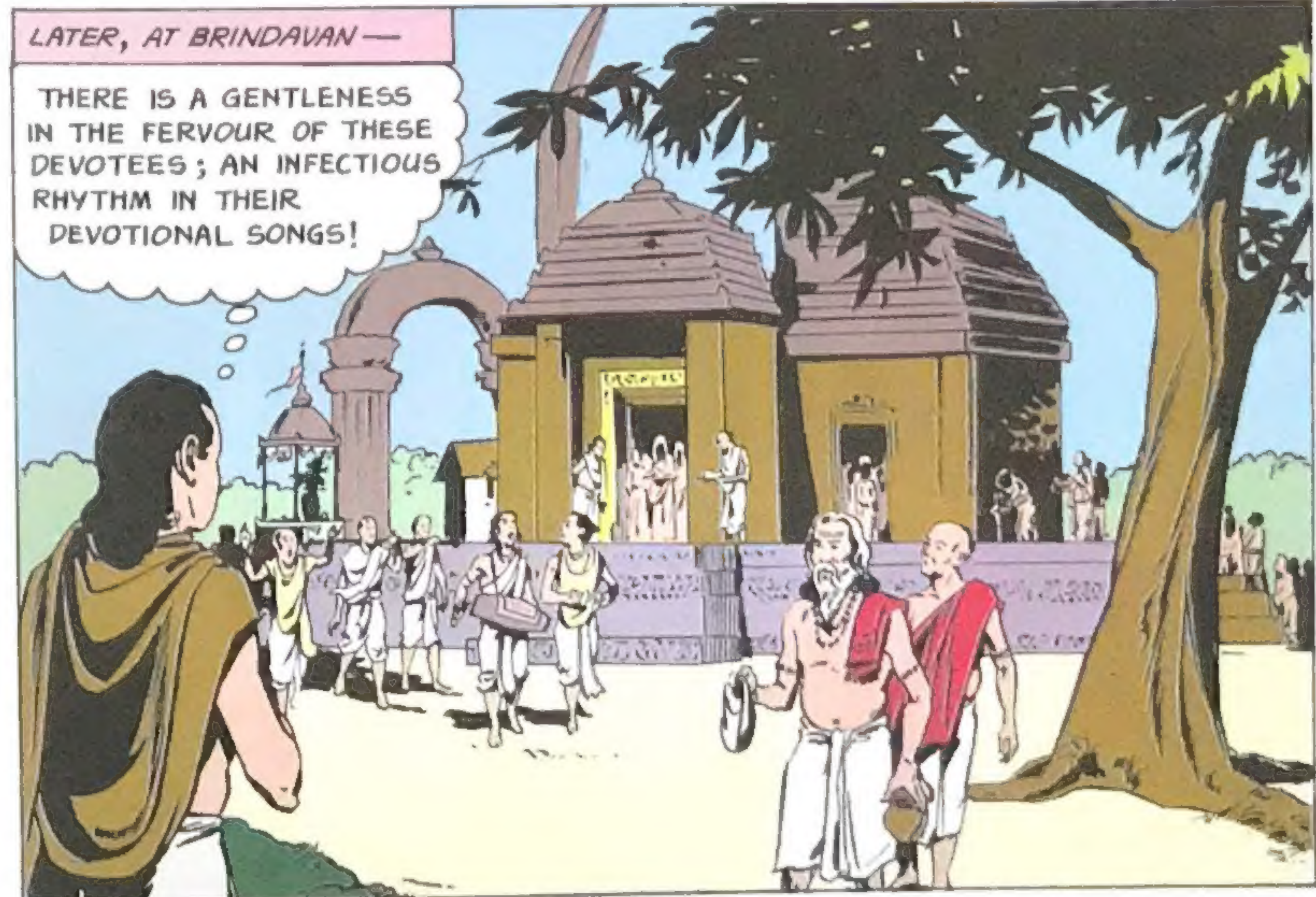


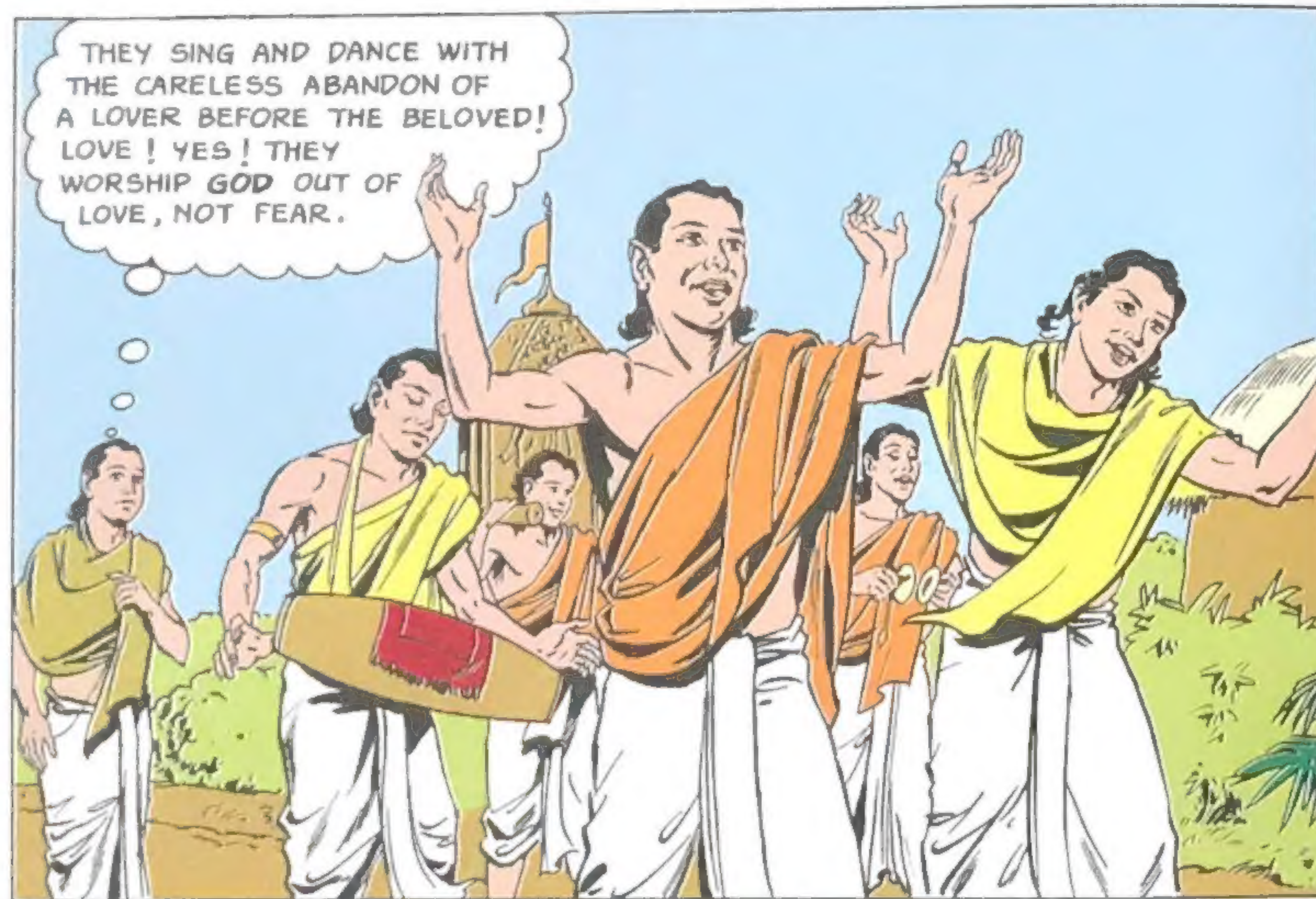
AND SO BEGAN SHANKAR DEV'S VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.



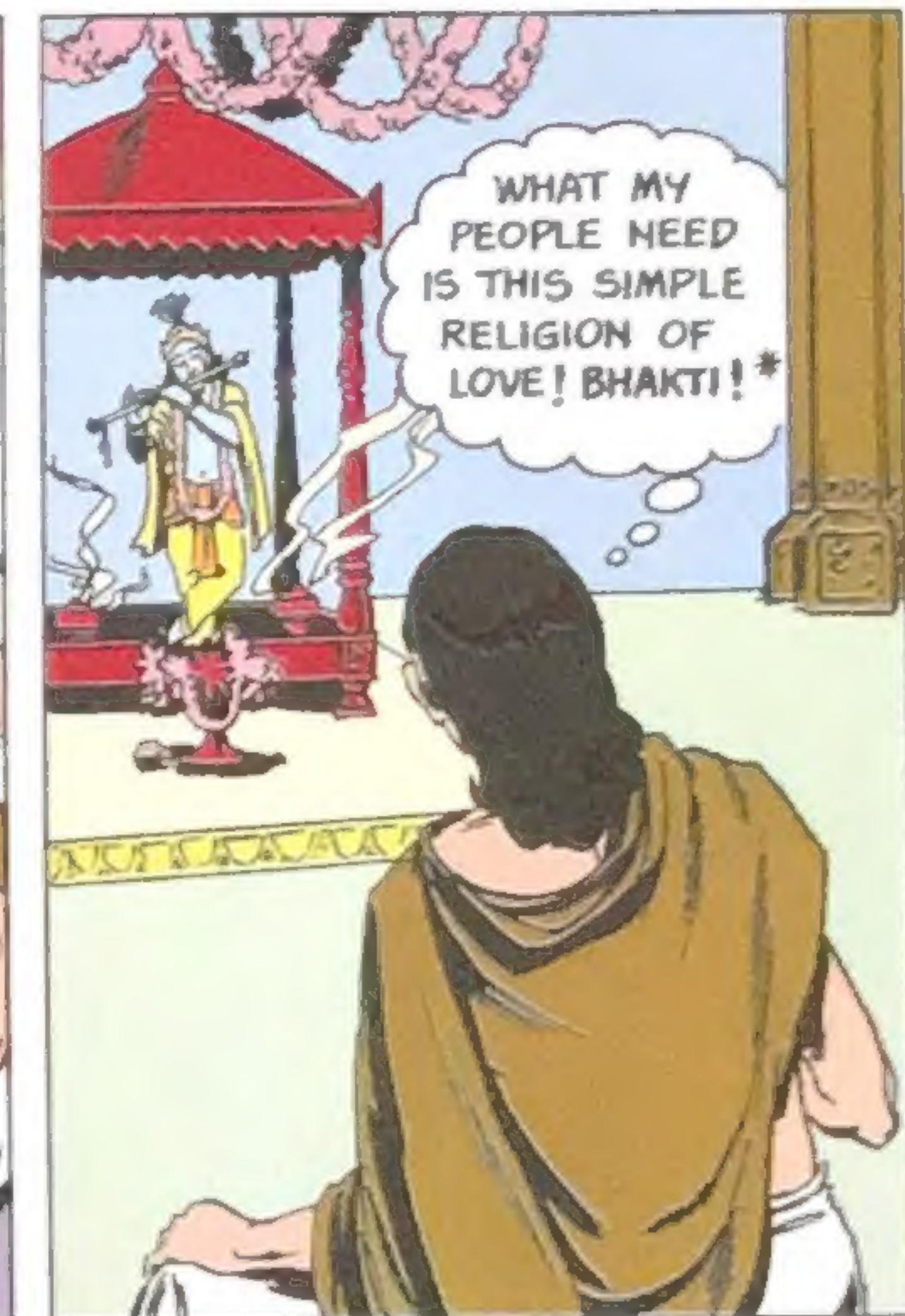
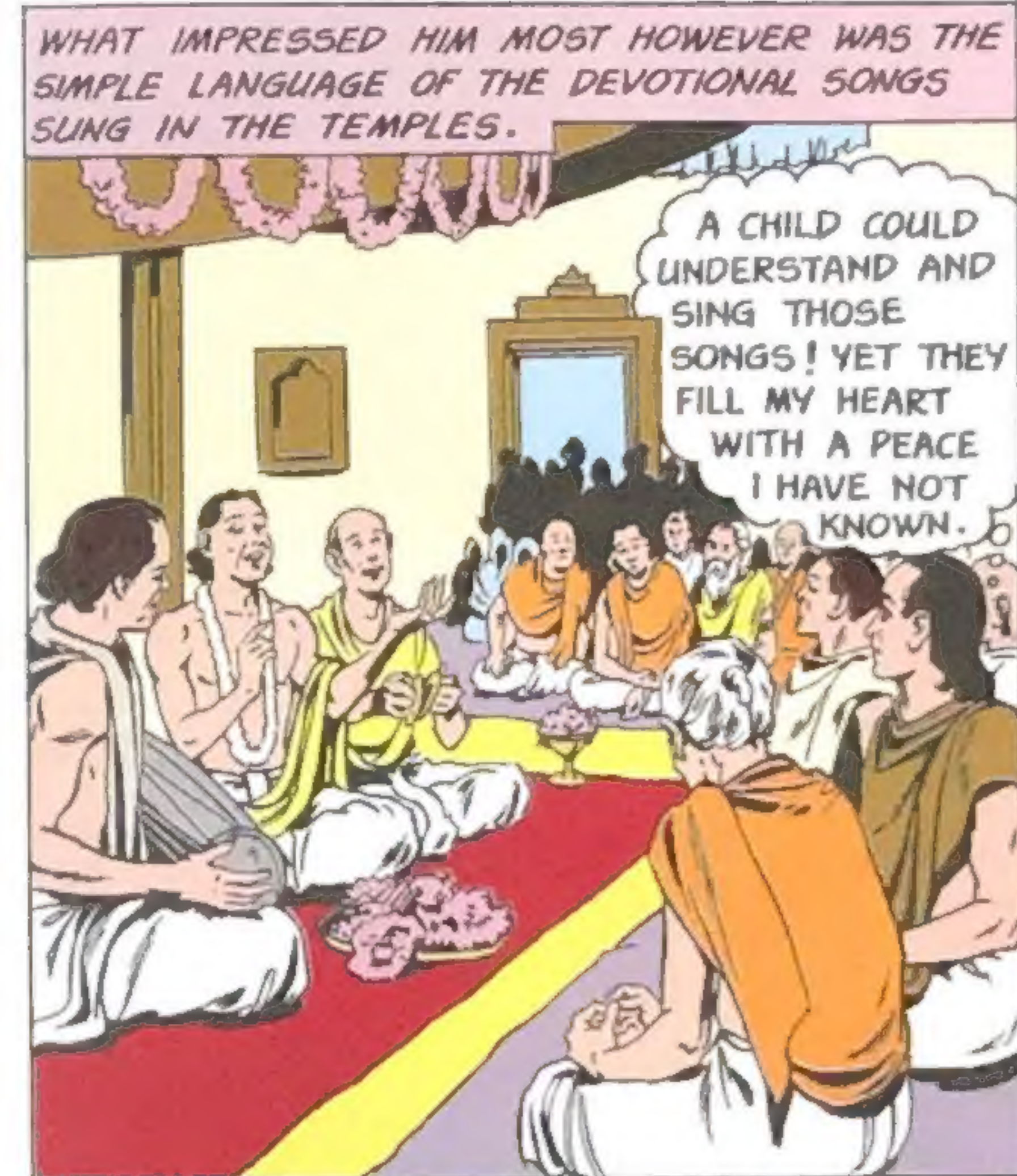
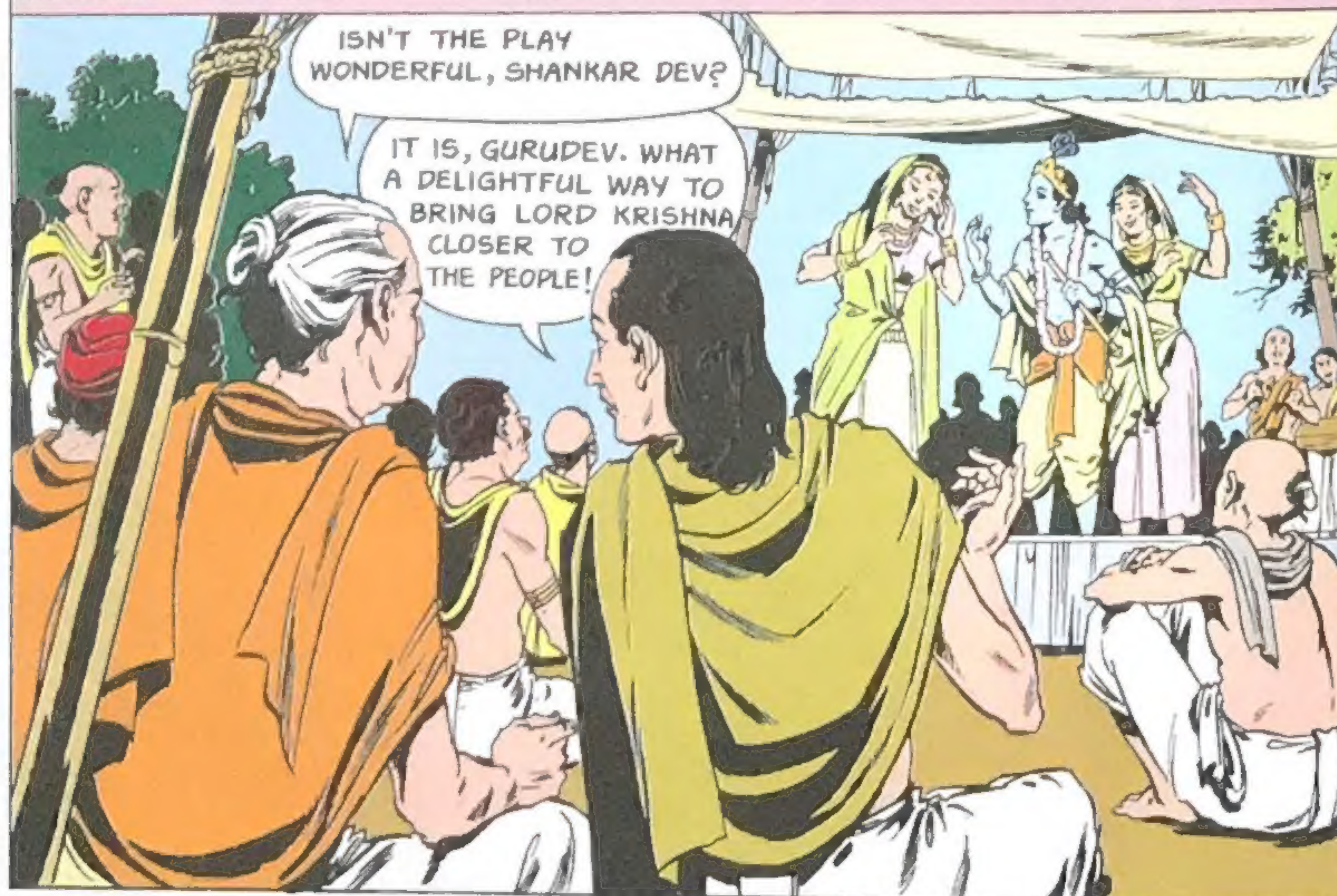
LATER, AT BRINDAVAN —

THERE IS A GENTLENESS IN THE FERVOUR OF THESE DEVOTEES; AN INFECTIOUS RHYTHM IN THEIR DEVOTIONAL SONGS!

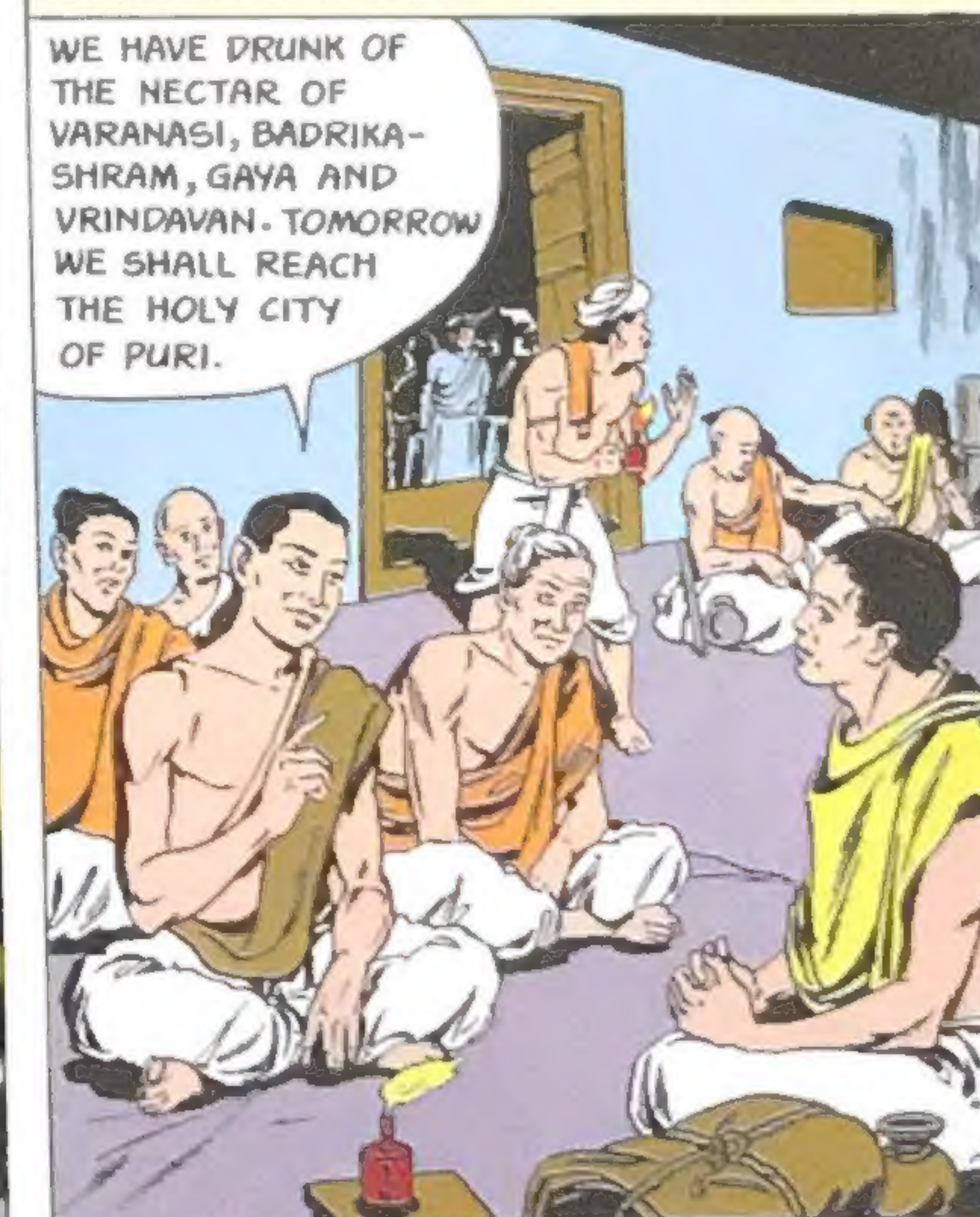


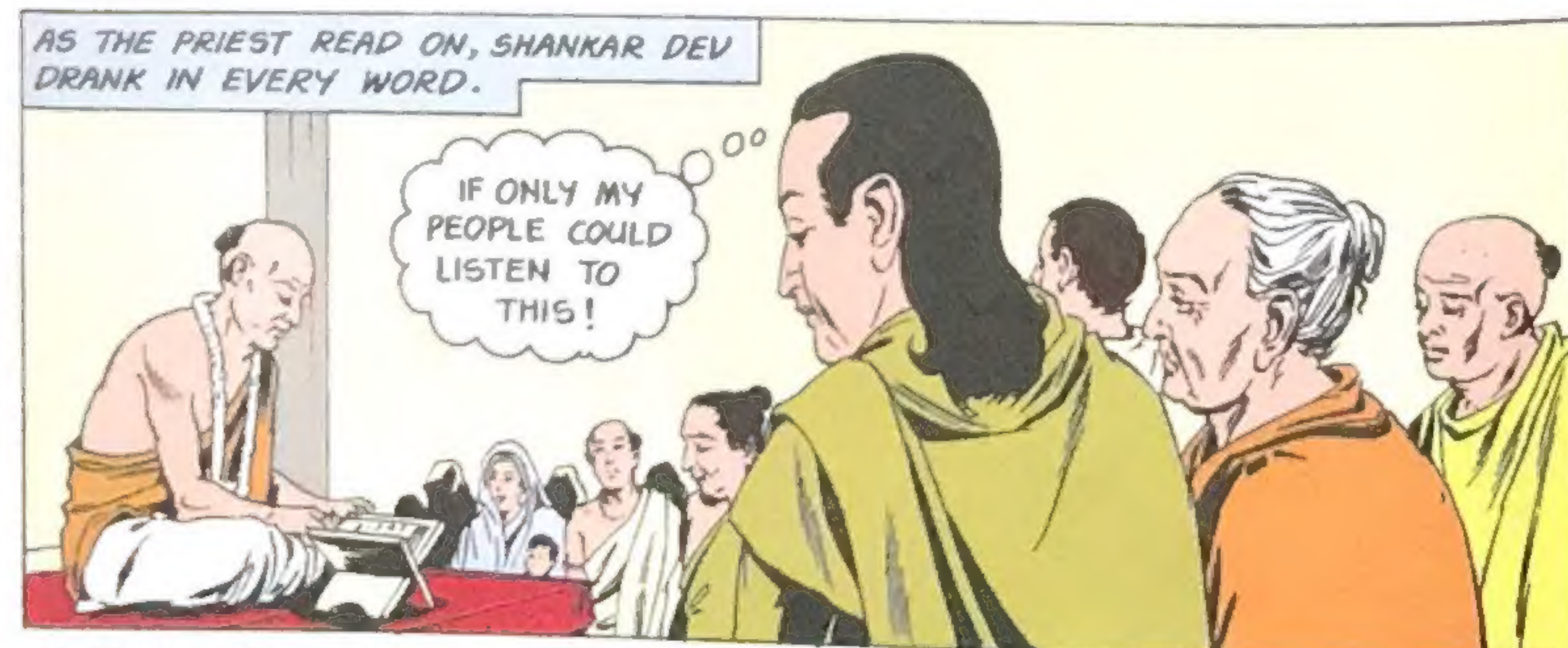
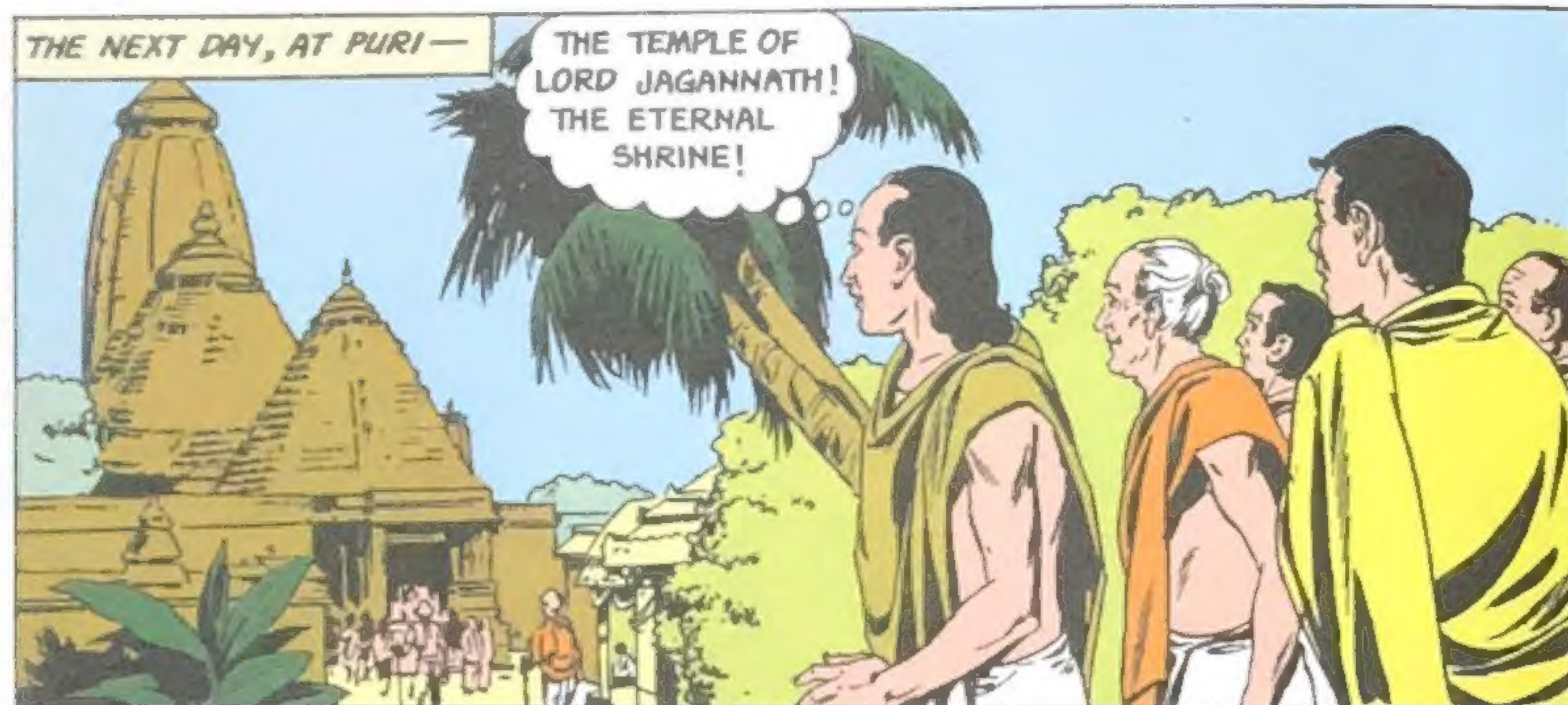


SHANKAR DEV ALSO SAW MUSICAL PLAYS ON THE LIVES OF KRISHNA AND RAMA.



FOR TWELVE YEARS SHANKAR DEV AND HIS COMPANIONS ROAMED THE COUNTRY.





* COPIES OF THE BHAGAWAT WERE NOT EASILY AVAILABLE IN THOSE DAYS AS THEY HAD TO BE HANDWRITTEN ON PALM LEAVES. 16



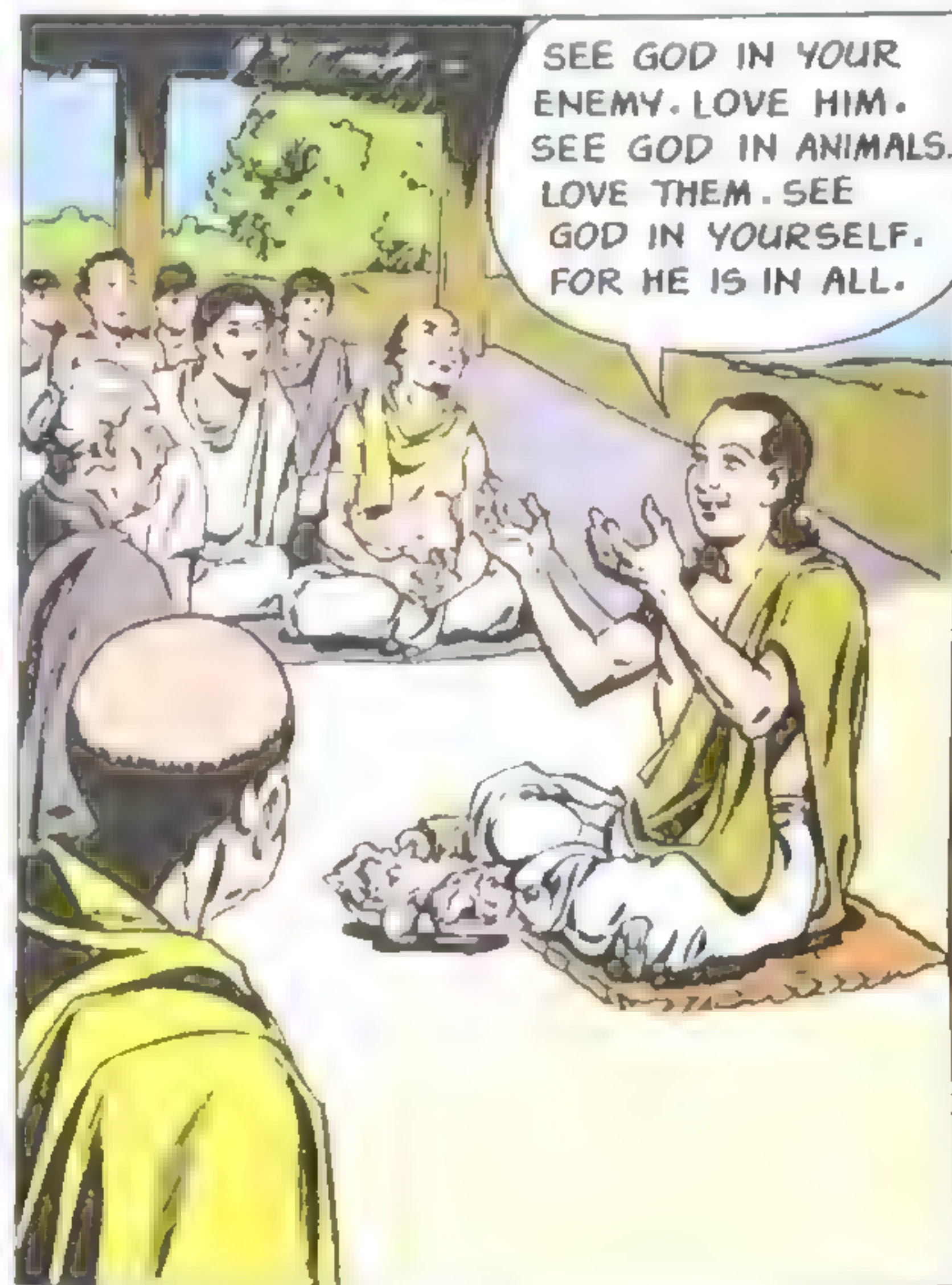
AT LAST, FOR KERSUTI'S SAKE, SHANKAR DEV MARRIED AGAIN AND HAD THREE SONS. BUT HE DID NOT LET MARRIAGE INTERFERE WITH HIS SPIRITUAL LIFE.



AT BARDOWA, WHERE HE NOW LIVED, SHANKAR DEV SELECTED A SECLUDED PLACE AND BUILT A NAMGHAR.* THIS BECAME THE WELLSPRING OF THE NEW RELIGION.



COME, MY BROTHERS. LET US CAST ASIDE THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE. OPEN YOUR EYES.



SEE GOD IN YOUR ENEMY. LOVE HIM. SEE GOD IN ANIMALS. LOVE THEM. SEE GOD IN YOURSELF. FOR HE IS IN ALL.

* HOUSE OF WORSHIP

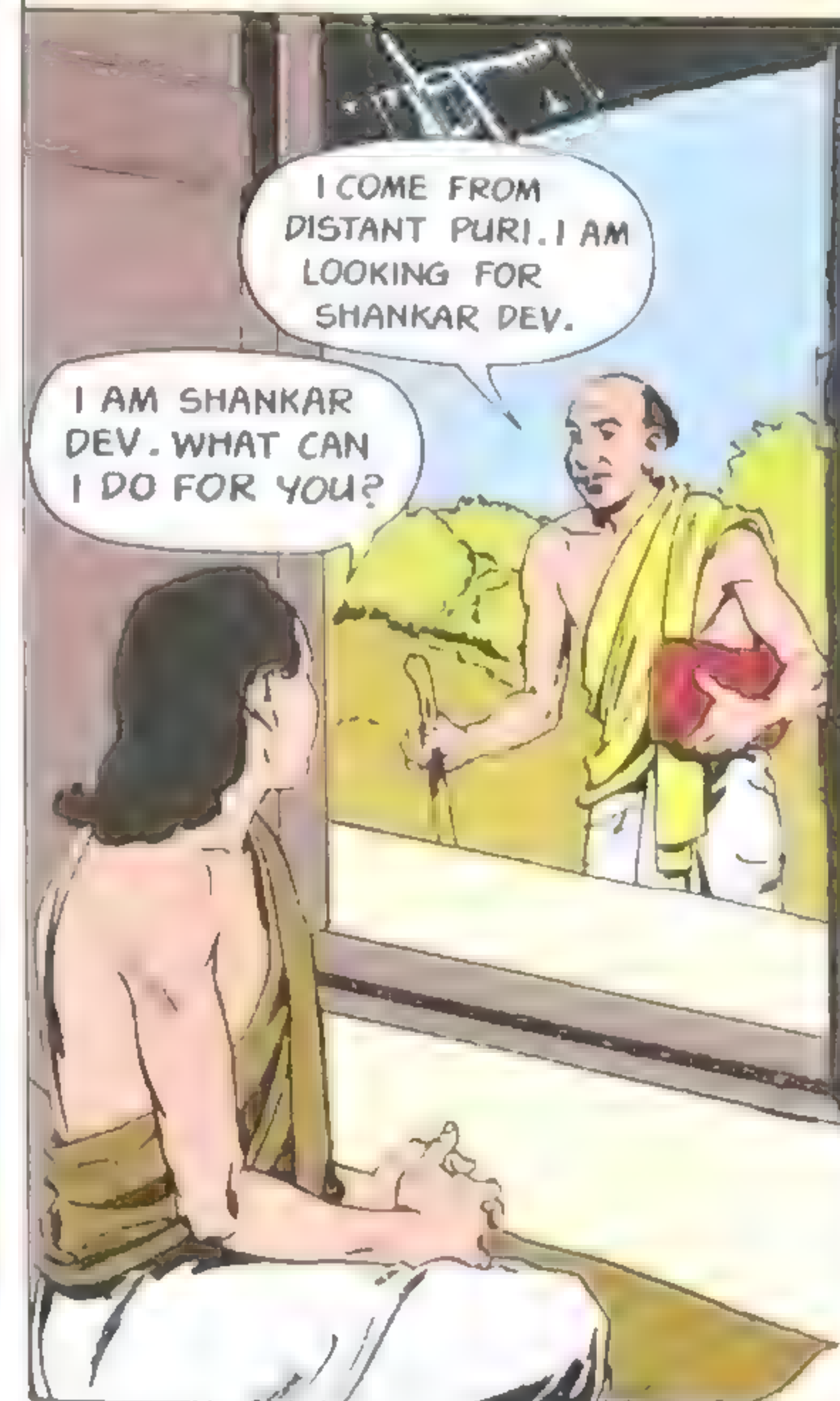
SHUN THE STRANGE DEITIES THAT WILL BE PLEASED ONLY WITH THE BLOOD OF INNOCENT ANIMALS. WORSHIP THE ONE WHO IS CONTENT WITH YOUR LOVING DEVOTION.



AND SO, THE EKASHARANA DHARMA, SHANKAR DEV'S VAISHNAVA MOVEMENT TOOK ROOT IN ASSAM.



ONE DAY, A STRANGER CAME TO BARDOWA.



I COME FROM DISTANT PURI. I AM LOOKING FOR SHANKAR DEV.

I AM SHANKAR DEV. WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

MY NAME IS JAGDISH MISHRA. I HAVE BROUGHT A COPY OF THE BHAGAWAT PURANA FOR YOU.

THE HOLY BOOK? CAN IT BE TRUE?

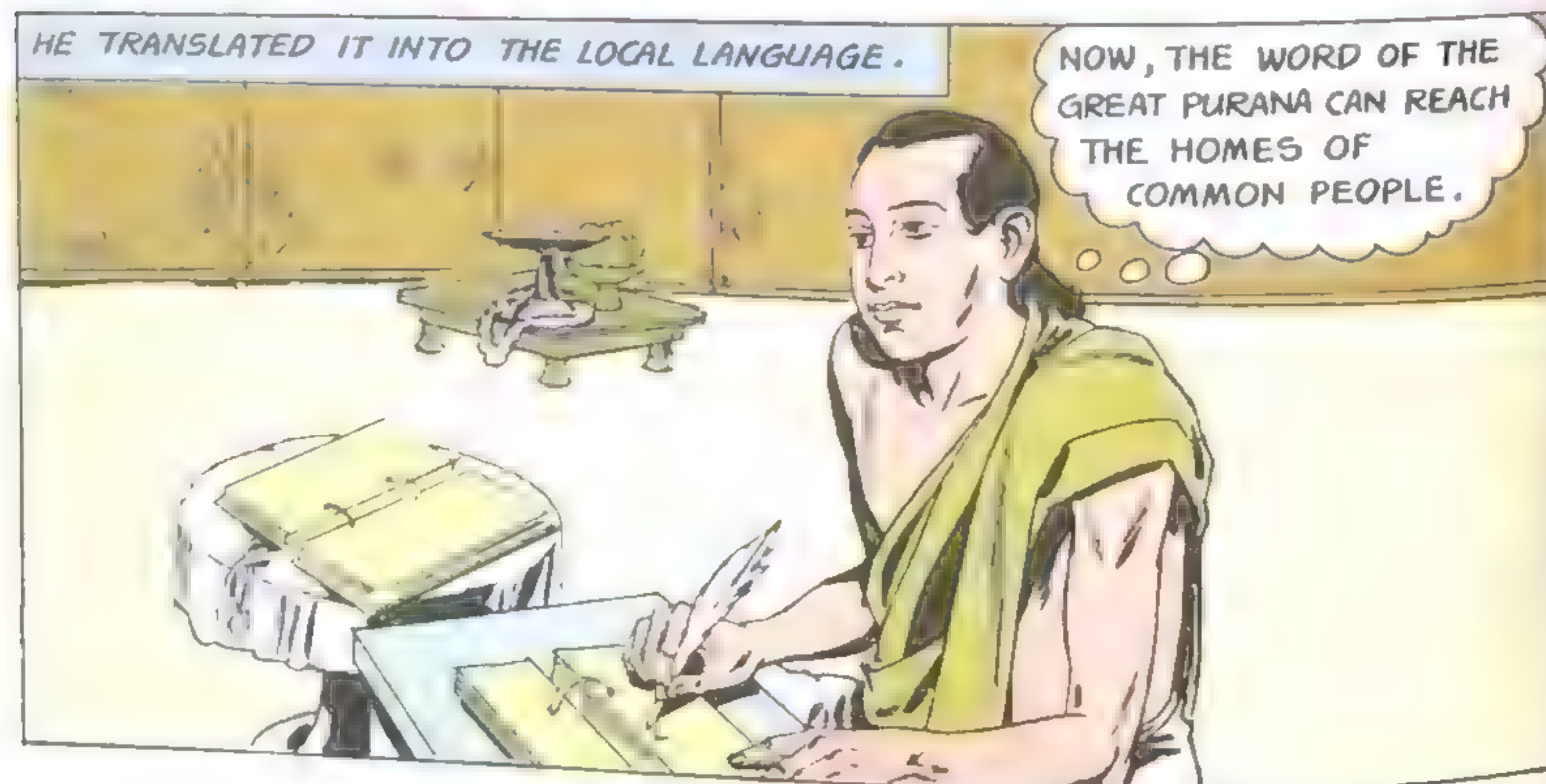




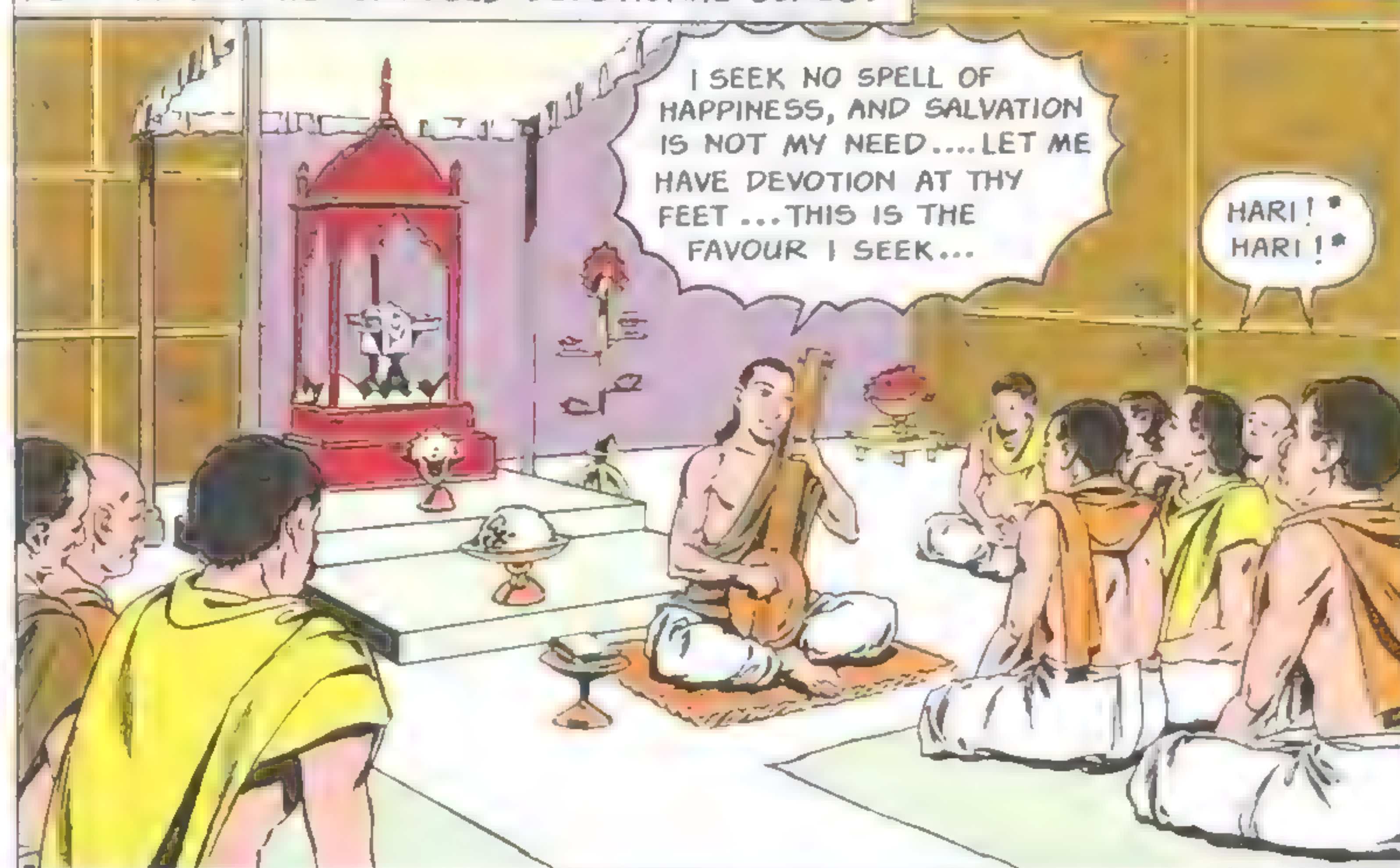
SHANKAR DEV MADE THE TEACHINGS OF THE BHAGAWAT, THE BASIS OF HIS DHARMA AND THE WORK, THE DEITY



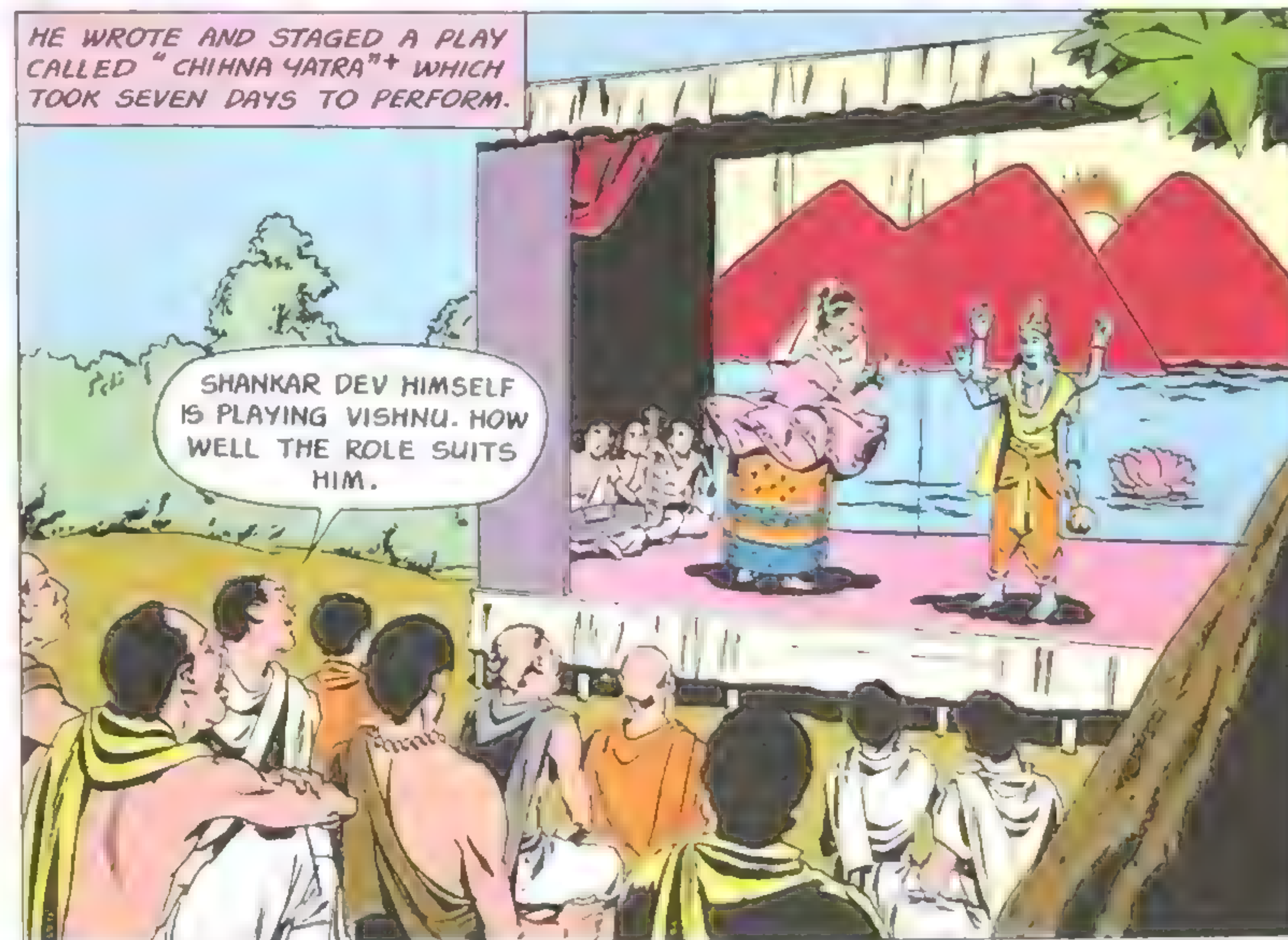
HE TRANSLATED IT INTO THE LOCAL LANGUAGE.



HIS POETIC GENIUS BLOSSOMED. IT BECAME HIS MEDIUM FOR PROPAGATING THE NEW DHARMA. HE COMPOSED DEVOTIONAL SONGS.



HE WROTE AND STAGED A PLAY CALLED "CHIHNA YATRA" * WHICH TOOK SEVEN DAYS TO PERFORM.



* ANOTHER NAME FOR VISHNU + DRAMA WITH PAINTINGS

BEFORE, THERE WAS A PLAY WITH DANCE, MUSIC AND BACK-DROPS, BEEN STAGED. THE PEOPLE FELT AS IF THEY HAD BEEN TRANSPORTED TO ANOTHER WORLD.



I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE!

I SHALL GO TO THE NAMGHAR EVERY DAY TO HEAR SHANKAR DEV

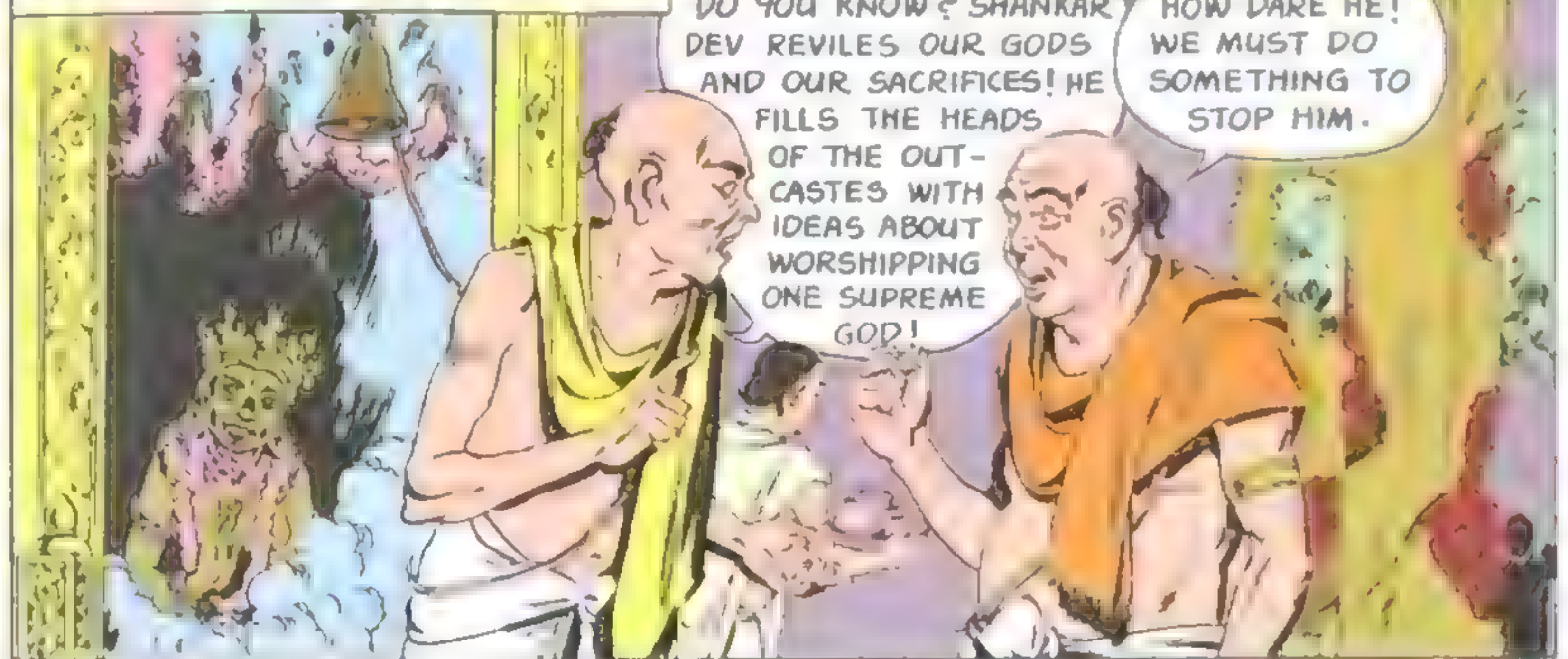
KACHARI AND MIRI GARO AND KHASI ALL FLOCKED TO THE NAMGHARS TO HEAR THE VERSATILE PREACHER



COME, MY BROTHERS. WE ARE ALL EQUAL IN THE EYES OF THE ONE GOD. COME AS KRISHNA'S DEVOTEES.

WHY DO YOU HESITATE? COME IN. THIS TEMPLE IS OPEN TO ALL.

BUT EVERY GREAT MOVEMENT INVARIABLY FACES OPPOSITION. THE PRIESTS OF VARIOUS CULTS WERE UP IN ARMS.



DO YOU KNOW? SHANKAR DEV REVILES OUR GODS AND OUR SACRIFICES! HE FILLS THE HEADS OF THE OUT-CASTES WITH IDEAS ABOUT WORSHIPPING ONE SUPREME GOD!

HOW DARE HE! WE MUST DO SOMETHING TO STOP HIM.

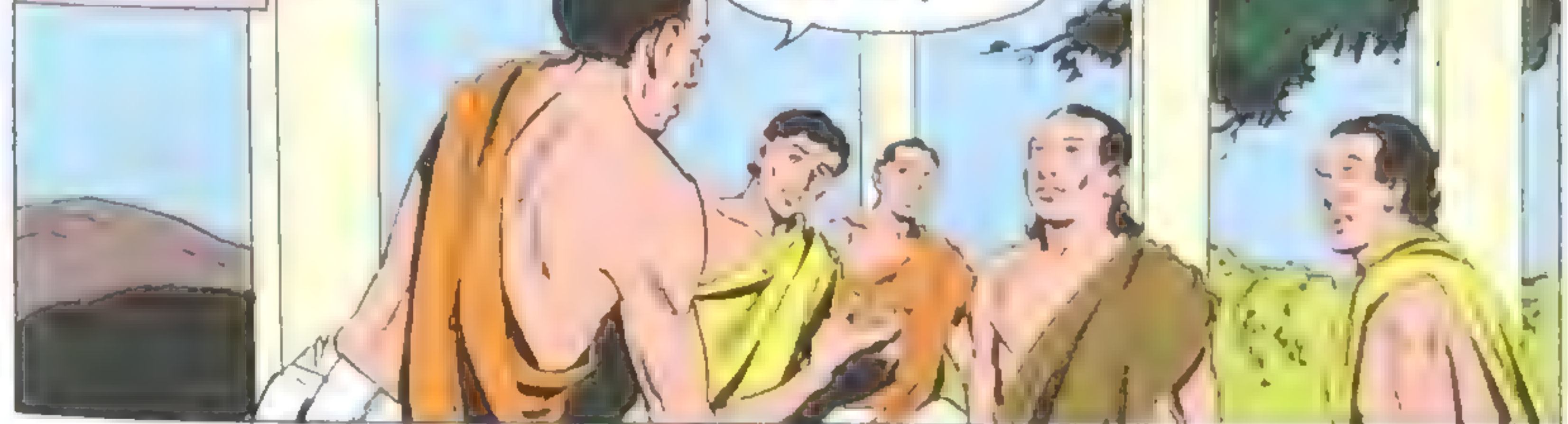
THE VAISHNAVAS BEGAN TO BE HARASSED. THEY WERE STONED ON THE STREETS AND ABUSED.

FORGIVE THEM. THEY DID IT THROUGH IGNORANCE.



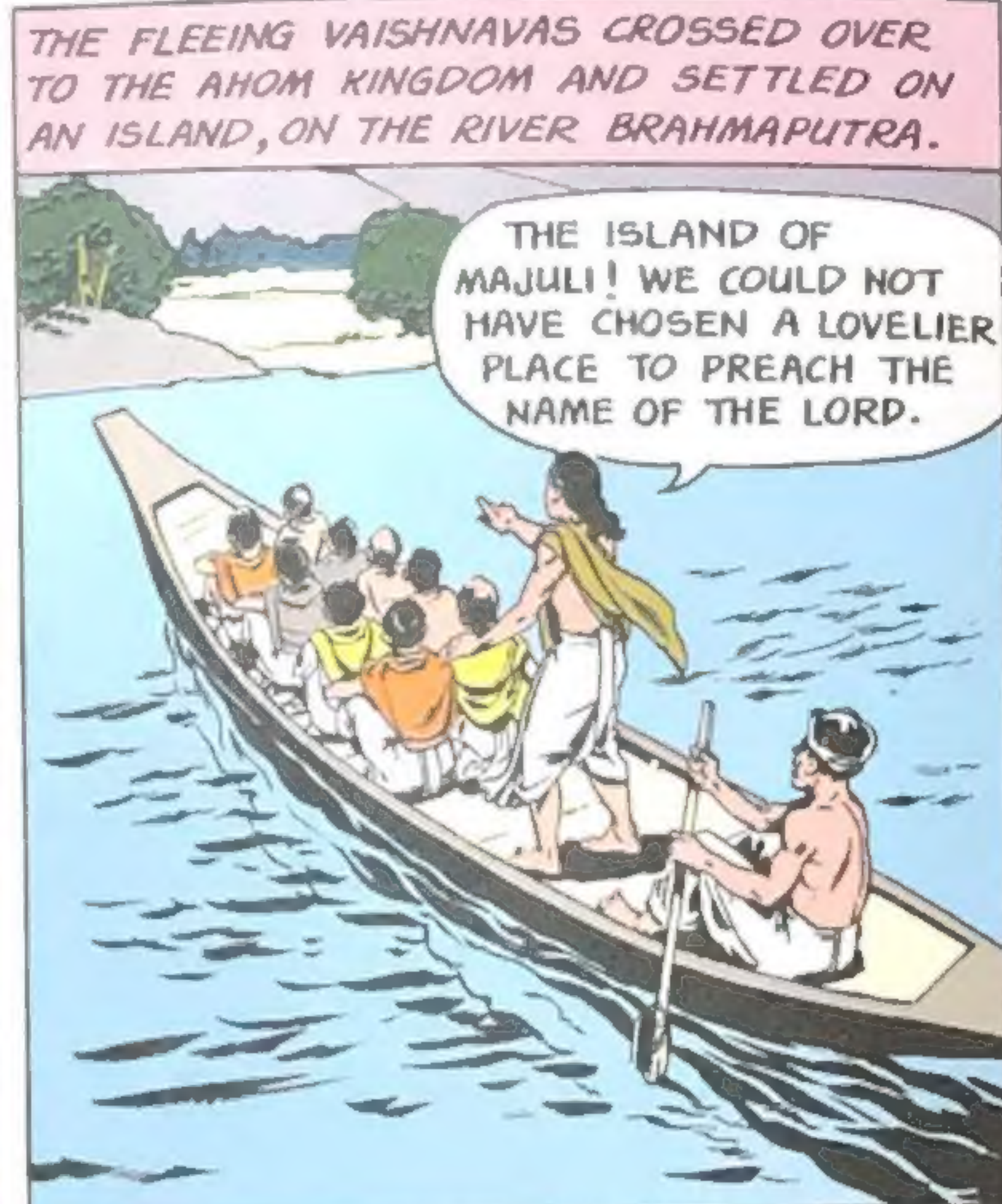
THE PRIESTS ALSO MANAGED TO TURN THE KACHARI KING AGAINST SHANKAR DEV AND THE VAISHNAVAS.

GURUDEV, THE KING IS OUT TO ATTACK US! WHAT SHALL WE DO?





WE MUST PROTECT OUR DHARMA AT ALL COSTS. LET US GO NORTH TO THE AHOM KINGDOM.

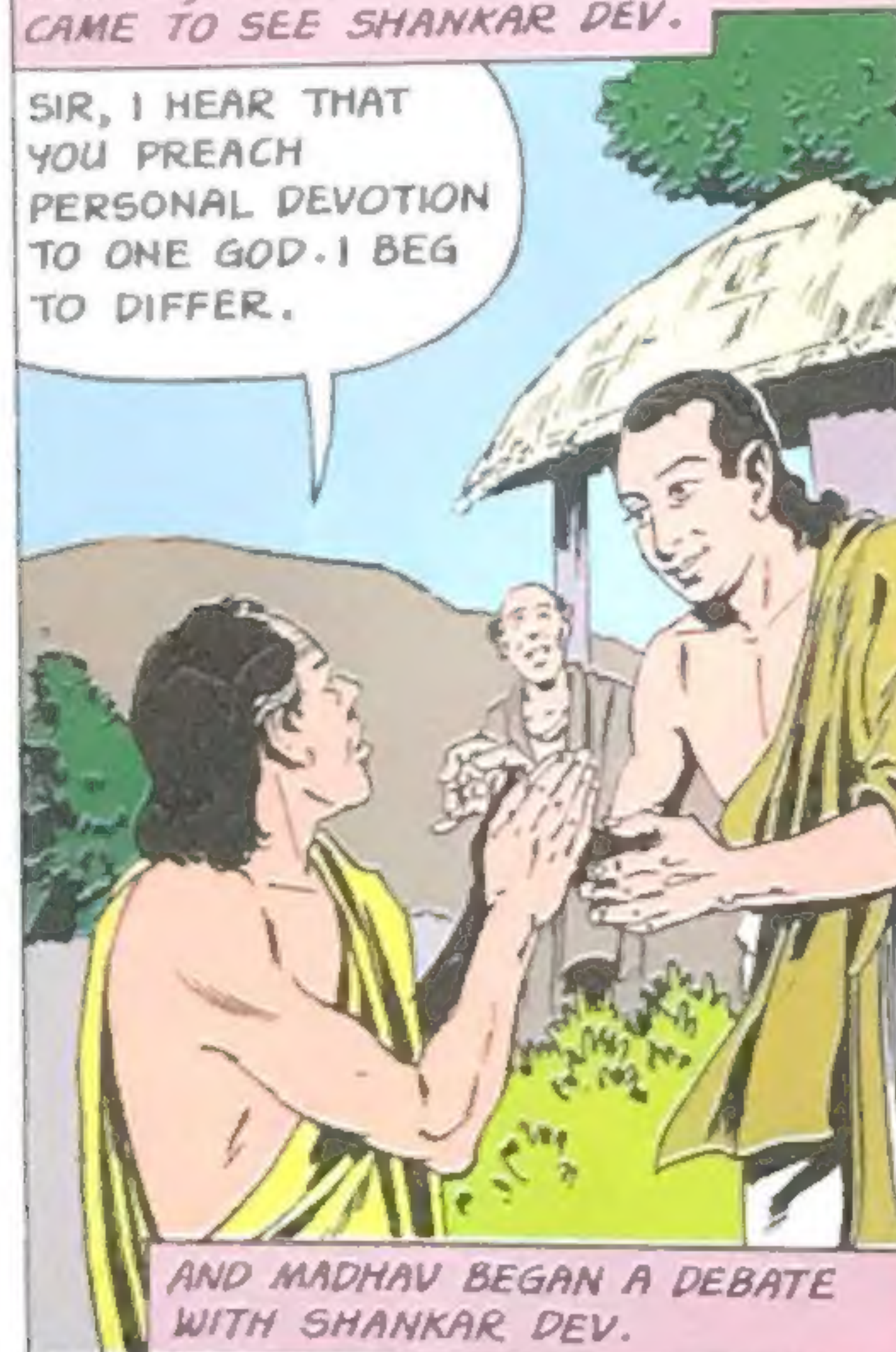


THE FLEEING VAISHNAVAS CROSSED OVER TO THE AHOM KINGDOM AND SETTLED ON AN ISLAND, ON THE RIVER BRAHMAPUTRA.

THE ISLAND OF MAJULI! WE COULD NOT HAVE CHOSEN A LOVELIER PLACE TO PREACH THE NAME OF THE LORD.

AT THE TOWN OF DHUWAHAT IN MAJULI, A MAN NAMED MADHAV DEV CAME TO SEE SHANKAR DEV.

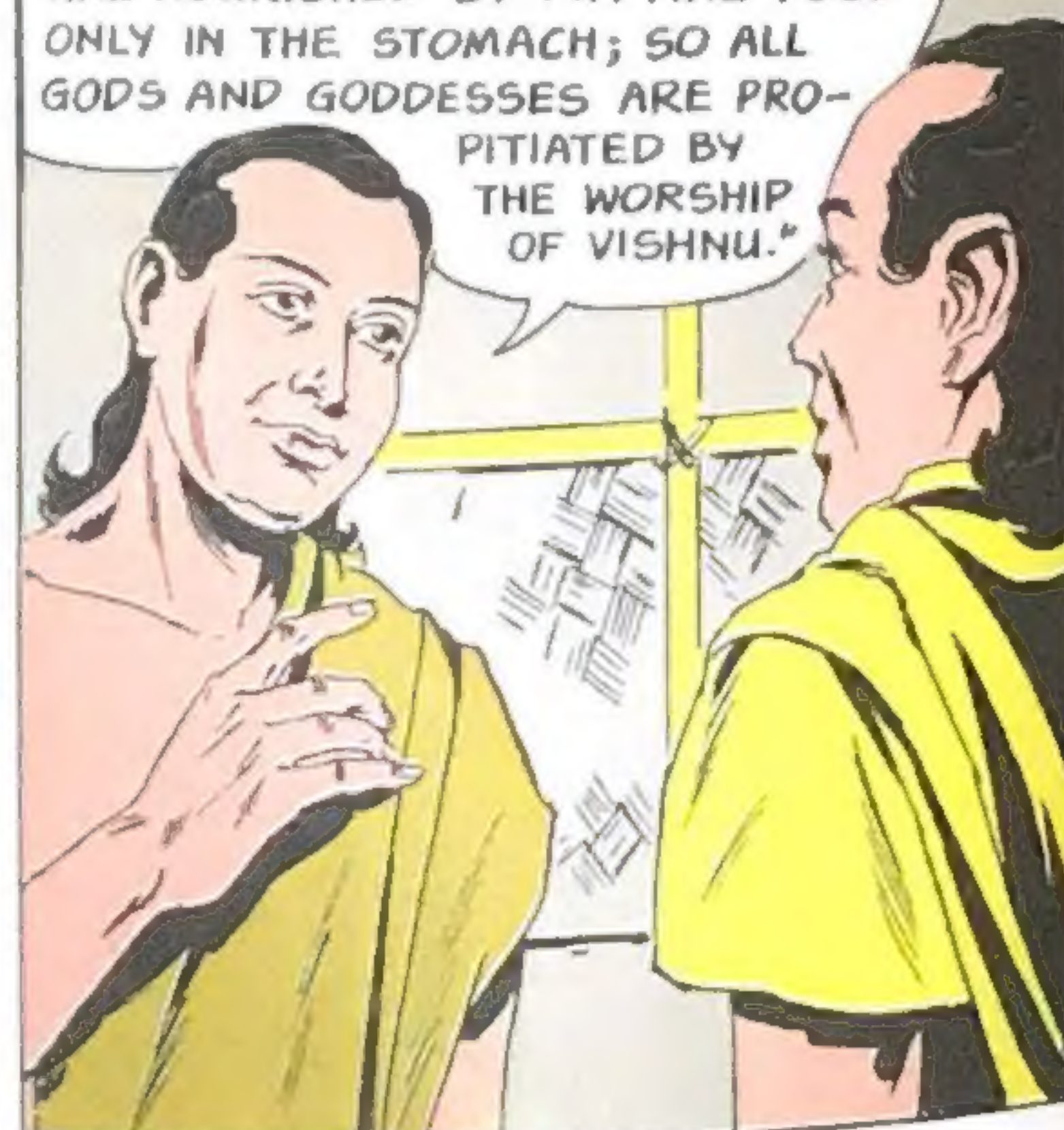
SIR, I HEAR THAT YOU PREACH PERSONAL DEVOTION TO ONE GOD. I BEG TO DIFFER.



AND MADHAV BEGAN A DEBATE WITH SHANKAR DEV.

THEY ARGUED FOR OVER FOUR HOURS. FINALLY, SHANKAR DEV QUOTED A LINE FROM THE BHAGAWAT PURANA.

"AS THE BRANCHES AND LEAVES OF A TREE ARE NOURISHED BY THE POURING OF WATER ONLY AT THE ROOT; AS THE LIMBS OF THE BODY ARE NOURISHED BY PUTTING FOOD ONLY IN THE STOMACH; SO ALL GODS AND GODDESSES ARE PROPITIATED BY THE WORSHIP OF VISHNU."



MADHAV WAS SILENT FOR A MOMENT. THEN —

I ACCEPT DEFEAT. DEVOTION TO VISHNU IS THE ONLY TRUTH. ACCEPT ME AS YOUR DISCIPLE, MASTER.

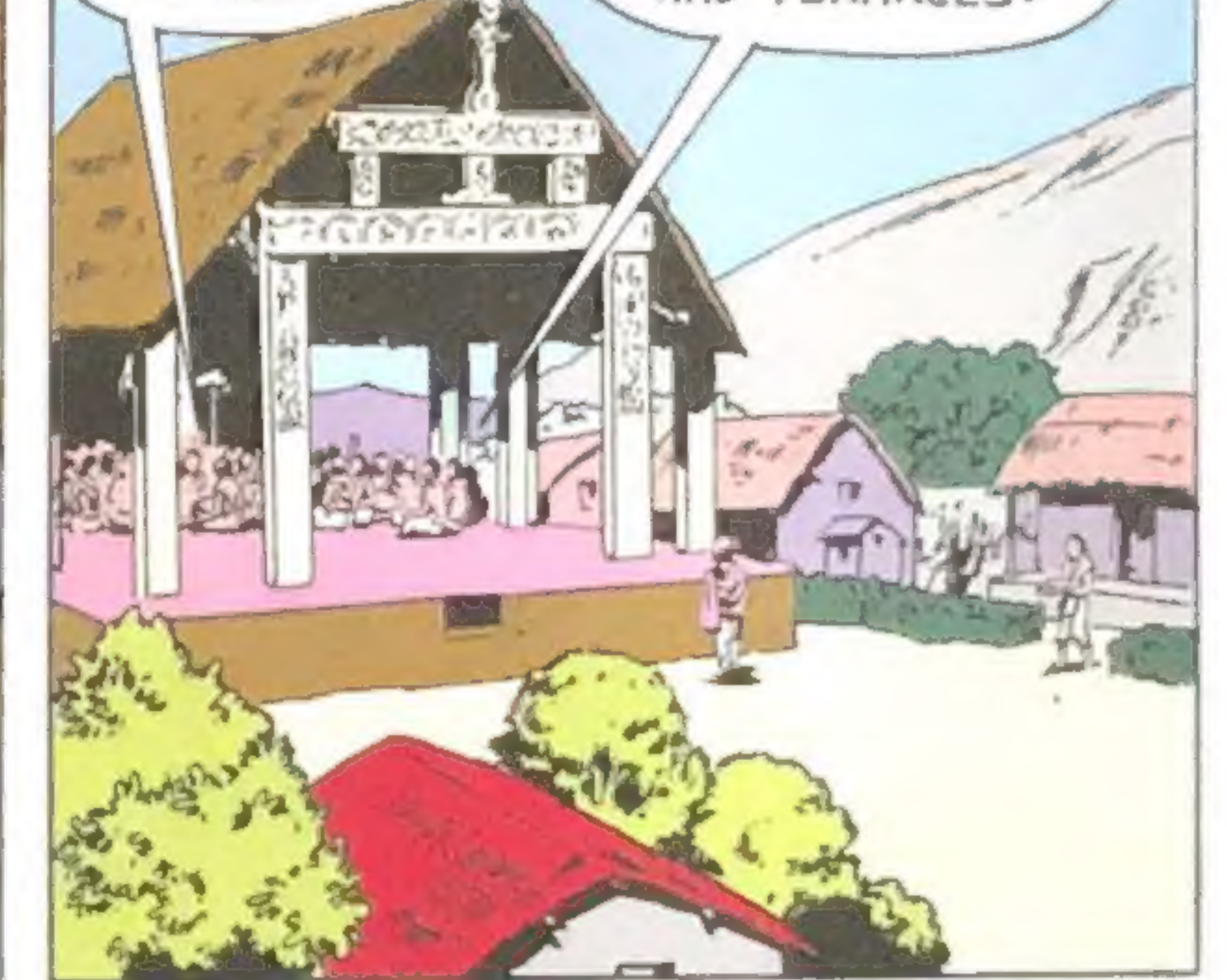
I TAKE YOU IN WITH OPEN ARMS. YOU SHALL BE A PILLAR OF THE NEW RELIGION.



UNDER BOTH SHANKAR DEV AND MADHAV DEV, THE DHARMA FLOURISHED. THEY ESTABLISHED 'SATRAS', OR RELIGIOUS CENTRES, IN MANY TOWNS AND VILLAGES.

KRISHNA HAS RISEN LIKE THE SUN AND HAS REVEALED NAMA-DHARMA* TO ALL.

IT EXCELS A HUNDRED CRORES OF SPELLS, SACRIFICES AND PENANCES.



SHANKAR DEV'S COLOURFUL PLAYS AND MELODIOUS SONGS STIRRED THE HEARTS OF THE DEVOTEES.

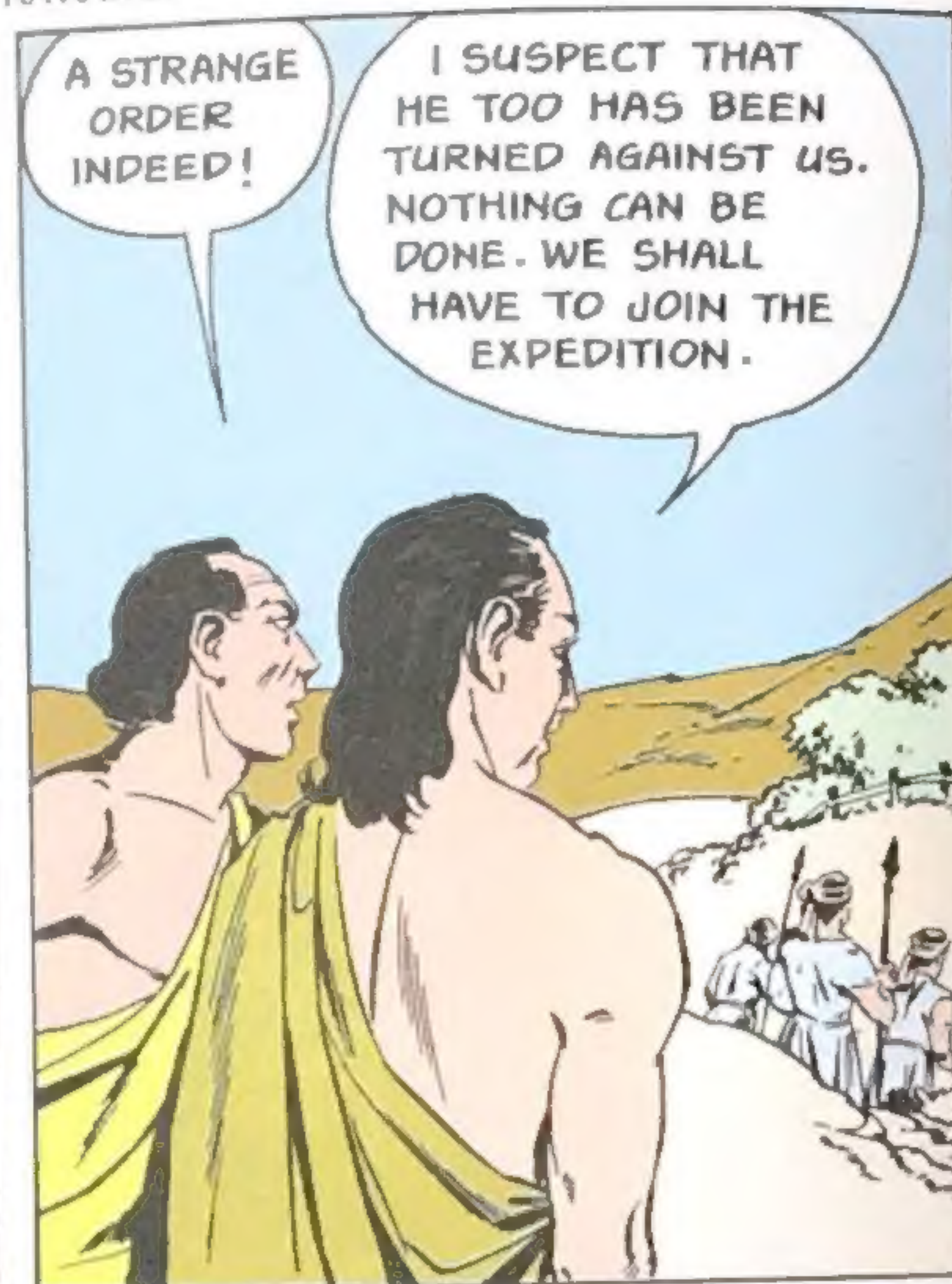
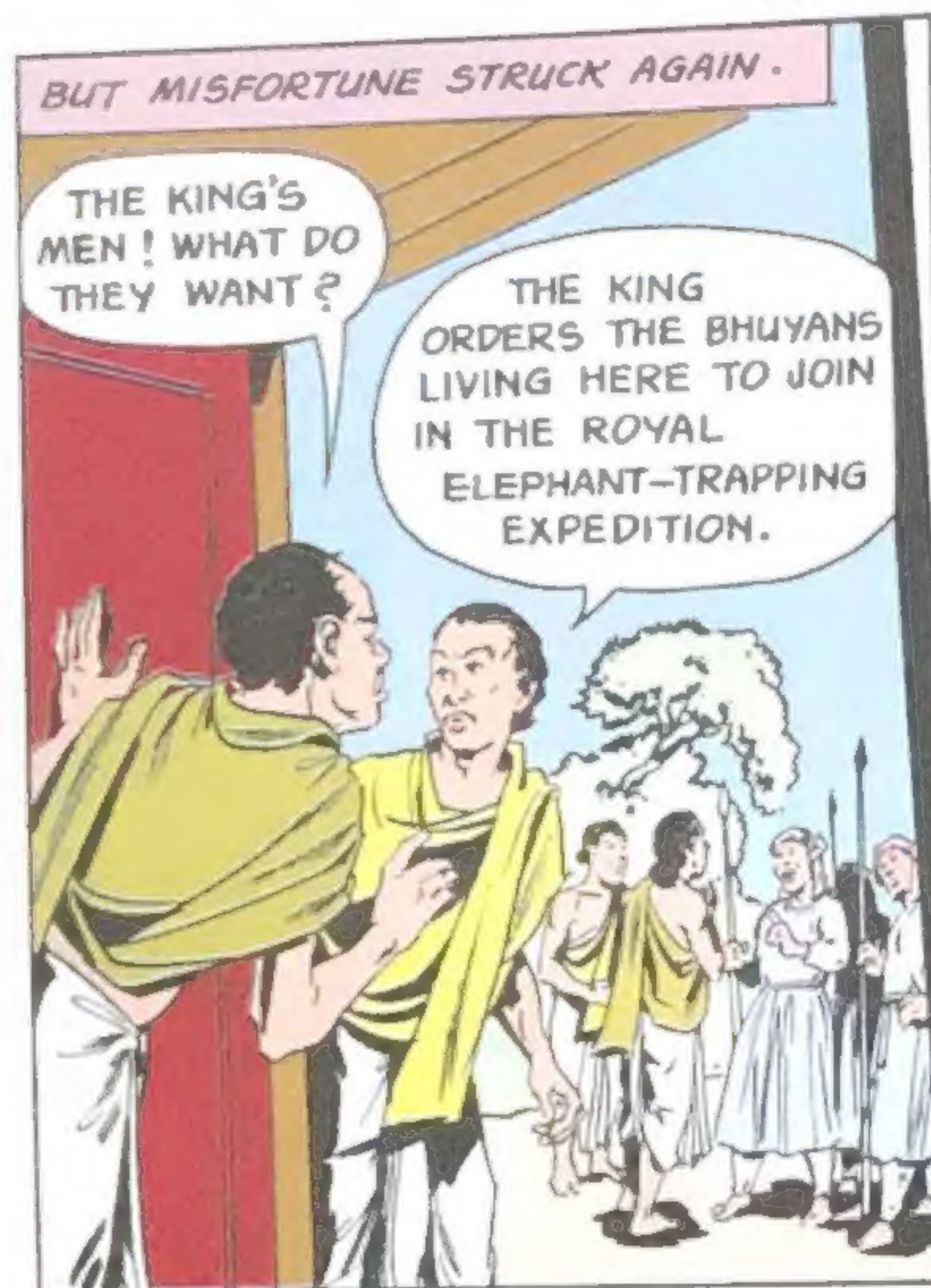


A LEARNED MAN READS HOLY BOOKS, BUT ONLY A DEVOTEE REALISES THEIR ESSENCE...

... JUST AS WATER HOLDS THE LOTUS, BUT ONLY THE BLACK BEE SUCKS ITS HONEY...

FOR WITHOUT DEVOTION, THERE CAN BE NO SALVATION.

* A FAITH WHERE CHANTING THE LORD'S NAME IS ENOUGH TO ATTAIN SALVATION



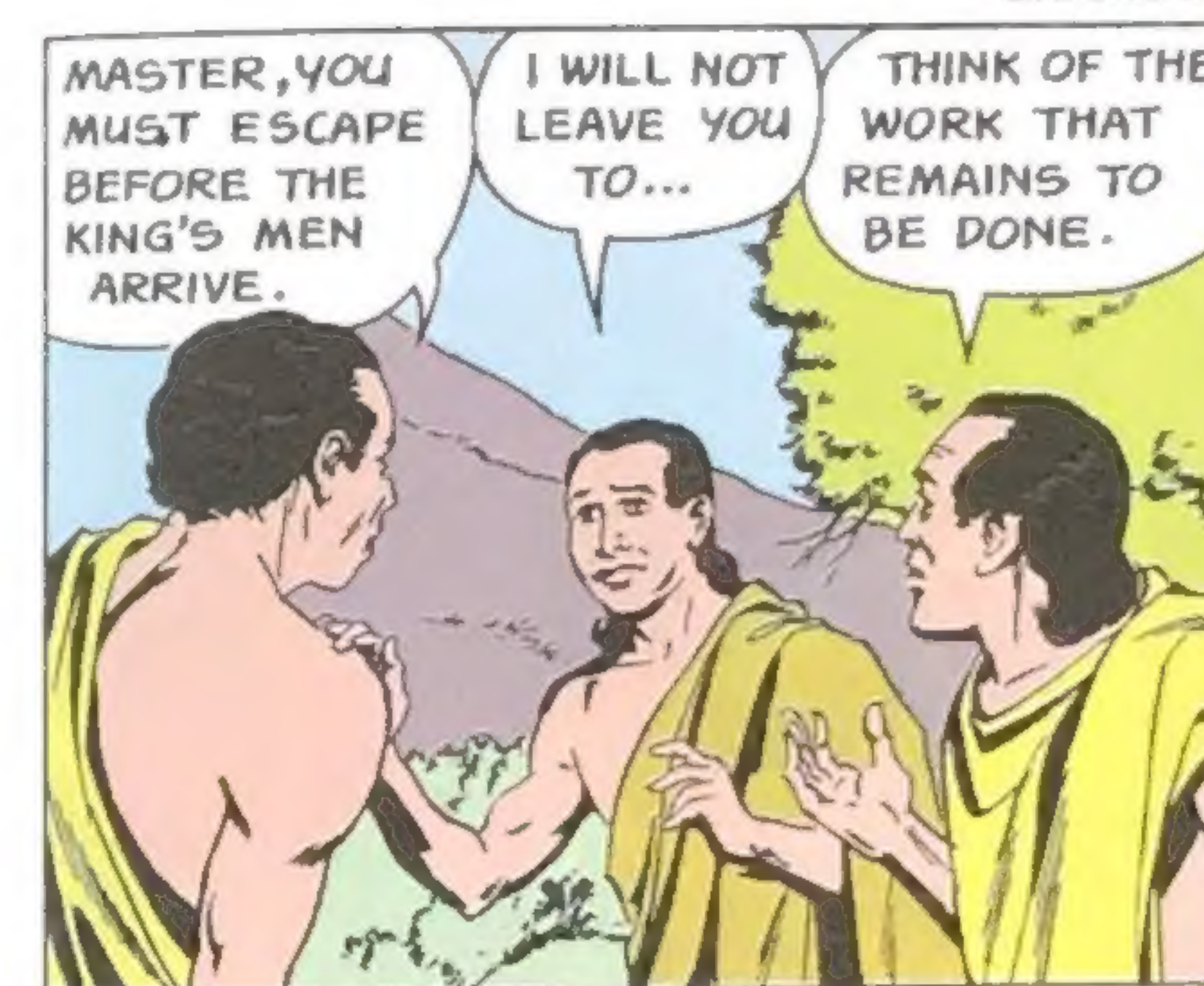
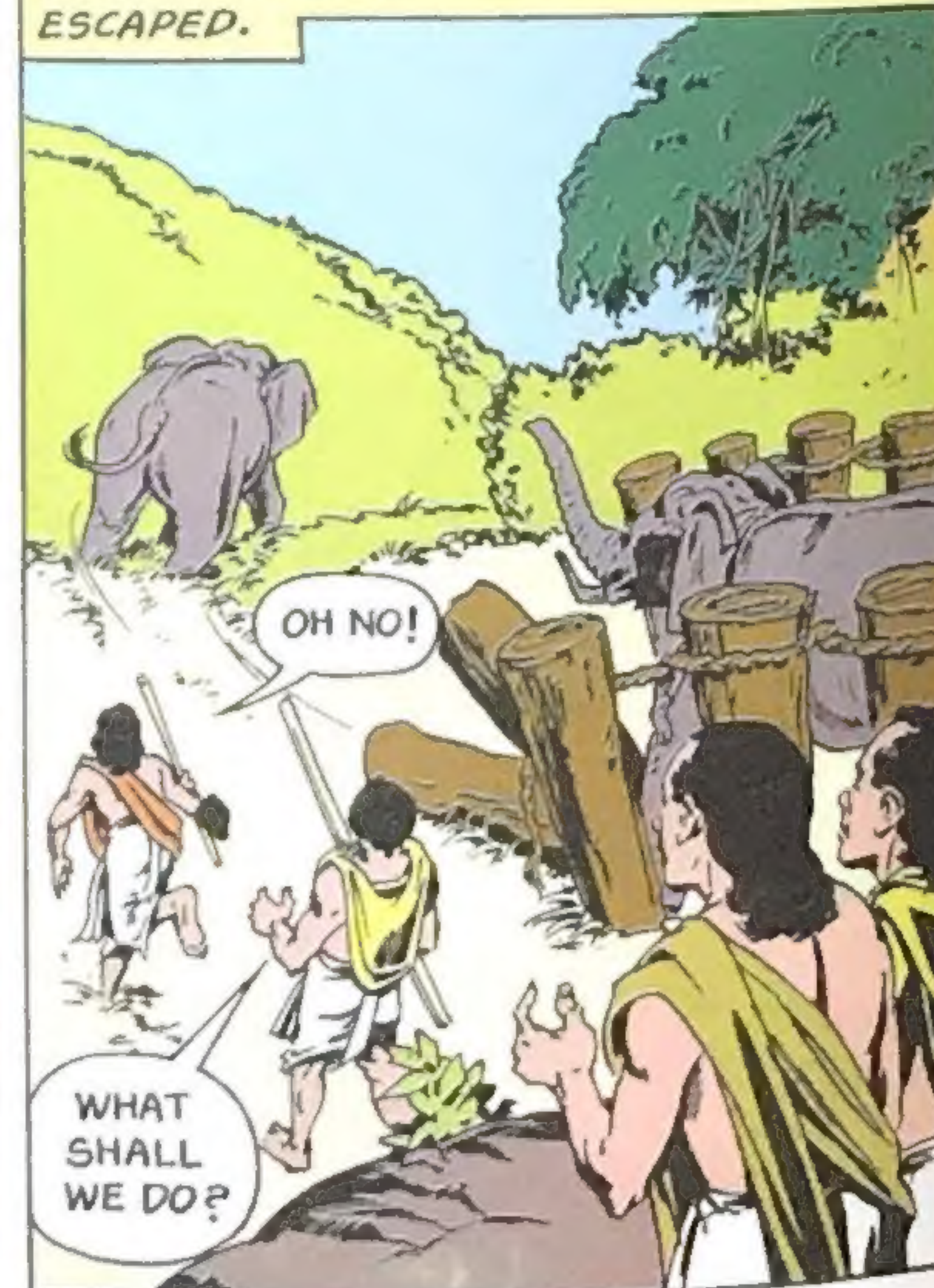
AFTER THE HUNT, SHANKAR DEV AND HIS FOLLOWERS WERE ORDERED TO GUARD THE ANIMALS.

TAKE CARE NOT TO LET THE ELEPHANTS ESCAPE.

IF THEY DO, YOU WILL BE BEHEADED!



UNFORTUNATELY, THE WILD ELEPHANTS BROKE THROUGH THE ENCLOSURE AND ESCAPED.



MADHAV DEV AND SHANKAR DEV'S SON-IN-LAW, HARI, WERE CAPTURED.



MADHAV DEV WAS RELEASED BECAUSE HE WAS A HOLY MAN. BUT HARI WAS BEHEADED.



WHEN MADHAV DEV BROUGHT THE NEWS TO SHANKAR DEV —



FROM BARPETA, SHANKAR DEV ALONG WITH A FEW OF HIS FOLLOWERS SET OUT ON A SECOND PILGRIMAGE.



ON THEIR WAY, WHILE PASSING THROUGH A JUNGLE, THEY SAW A DEER CAUGHT IN A HUNTER'S TRAP.



POOR THING! HOW IT STRUGGLES! RELEASE IT.



BUT WE HAVE DEPRIVED THE HUNTER OF HIS FOOD. I'LL LEAVE THIS COIN HERE - FOR HIM TO BUY FOOD FOR HIS FAMILY.

OUR GURUDEV TRULY HAS COMPASSION FOR ALL LIVING BEINGS.



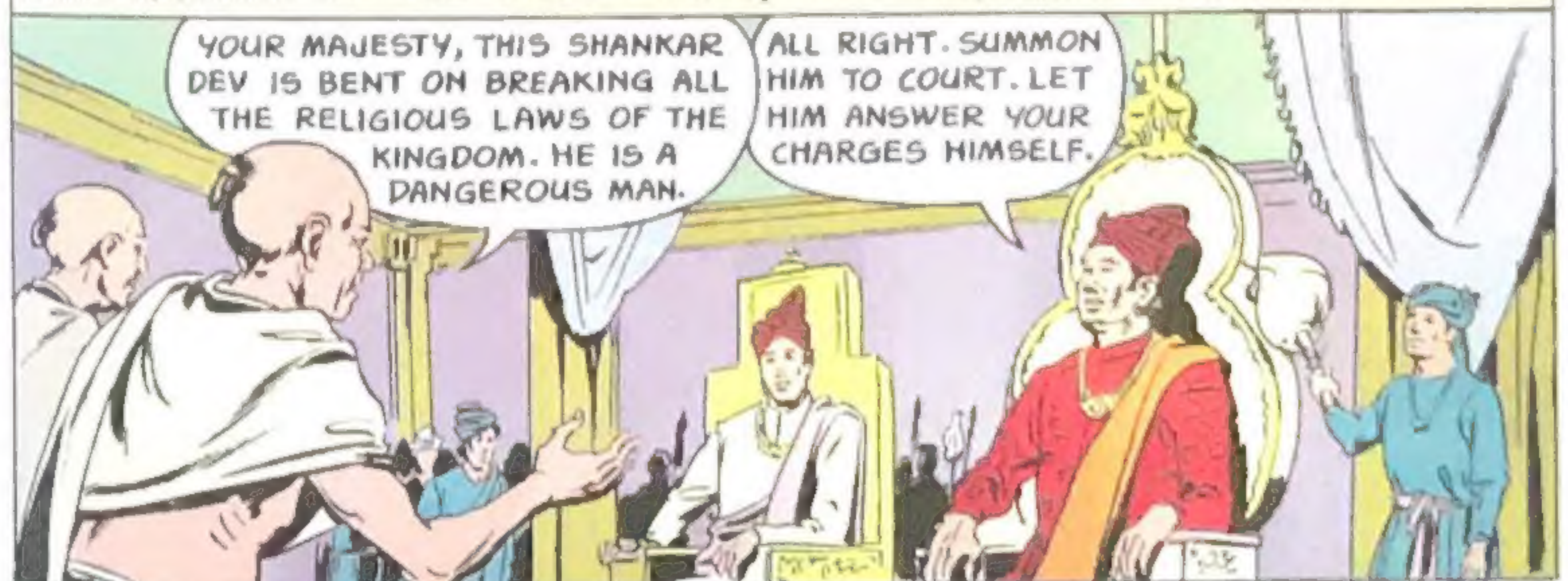
WHEN SHANKAR DEV RETURNED TO BARPETA AFTER COMPLETING HIS SECOND PILGRIMAGE OF BHARATVARSHA,† HE FOUND THAT THE NAMGHARS WERE FULL.

IT IS GOOD TO SEE THAT SO MANY MORE HAVE EMBRACED THE DHARMA.

IT IS ONLY NATURAL, SRIMANTA. THE EKASHARANA DHARMA IS LIKE A REFRESHING FOUNTAIN WHERE ALL TRAVELLERS MAY QUENCH THEIR THIRST.



BUT THE ORTHODOX PEOPLE OF BARPETA BEGAN TO POISON THE MINDS OF KING NARANARAYANA AND THE CROWN PRINCE, CHILARAYA, AGAINST SHANKAR DEV.



YOUR MAJESTY, THIS SHANKAR DEV IS BENT ON BREAKING ALL THE RELIGIOUS LAWS OF THE KINGDOM. HE IS A DANGEROUS MAN.

ALL RIGHT. SUMMON HIM TO COURT. LET HIM ANSWER YOUR CHARGES HIMSELF.

SHANKAR DEV CAME TO COURT AND ANSWERED THEIR CHARGES WITH ALL HUMILITY.

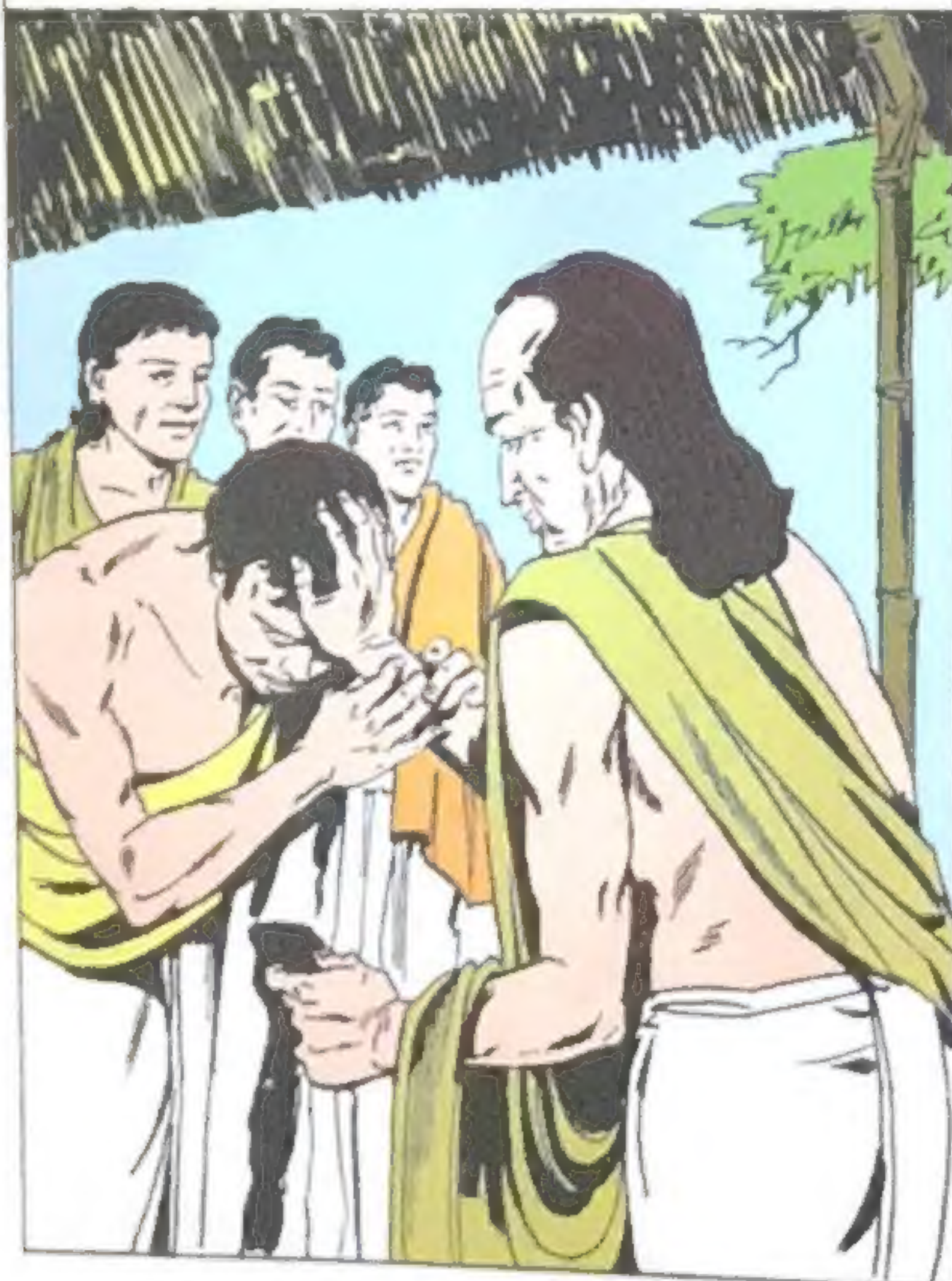


WHAT KIND OF A HOLY MAN ARE YOU? YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE A SPIRITUAL GURU.

LORD JAGANNATH IS MY GURU. ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?



FROM THEN ON SHANKAR DEV SPENT MANY PEACEFUL YEARS IN THE KOCH KINGDOM. WHEN HE WAS 120 YEARS OLD HE NOMINATED MADHAV DEV AS HIS SUCCESSOR...



...AND GAVE UP HIS MORTAL BODY.



राम ब्रह्म व्यापक जगजाना।
परमानंद परेस पुराना॥



Tulsidas' Rām Chārīt Mānās

It brought Ramayana to the masses



Read the story in Amar Chitra Katha